

In the Wake of War

The Political Geography of Transition in Eastern Sri Lanka

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Front page: A ferry makes its way across at "Ganga", where the island's largest river, the Mahaweli Ganga mouths in the Koddigar Bay and the Indian Ocean. The area used to be inaccessible during the Tamil insurgency, but the ramshackle ferries resumed service after the war. Meanwhile a brand-new "highway", with bridges across the various rivers and lagoons, was being constructed along the Bay. *(Photo by the author)*

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One point that becomes clear from the analysis that will follow is that nothing comes out of the blue; it comes into being, and thus carries the marks of what went before. That, I realise ever more, applies to myself as well. In closing, I would like to look back a little further and thank my family. My parents Roelof Klem and Wil van de Meeberg, my brother Martijn and my sister Jikke (whose own families have gradually expanded) have been there all along, and this has been and is a source of great joy and reassurance to me.

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Part I: Introduction

**Conceptual, contextual and methodological
background**

Chapter 1

This dissertation in a nutshell

The end of war is a confusing time. It marks the end of a period of tremendous human suffering, but the beginning of what? It comprises a dramatic political moment and a symbolic highpoint in history, but it also heralds a time of uncertainty. A time when the new rules of the game and lay of the land are articulated. And this process of re-ordering engenders opportunities and risks, it produces winners and losers. It is also a time of unforeseen consequences where regions reconfigure their connections to the wider world, opening up the floodgates to all kinds of influences. The end of war, in other words, is a time of drastic change, of hope and fear, but also a time of continuity. Society is not altogether reset, and the history of political dissent and contestation is not erased. War leaves baleful legacies and the end of organised warfare leaves many power relations in tact.

This dissertation narrates how the end of war played out on Sri Lanka's east coast. It analyses how the region underwent the transition from a situation of protracted warfare between two armed formations – the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) – to a situation of rebel defeat and a triumphant government consolidating its power. This dissertation comprises four articles, each of which covers a different aspect of wartime and post-war life in eastern Sri Lanka. By taking different angles on this transition, the articles provide insightful components of the larger narrative of the coastal region. And between them, they call into question some of the preponderant ideas on “war to peace transitions”, and they provide important building blocks for rethinking our understanding of such transitions.

It is fairly obvious that a linear and dichotomic understanding of “war to peace transition” is naïve and over-simplistic. Such transitions do not comprise a straightforward change from chaos and lawlessness to order and justice, from hatred to harmony. They do not simply replace the violent confrontations at the

battlefield with democratic politics in parliament, and it is unhelpful to think of them simply as swords (or mortars) turning into ploughshares (or tractors). While the literature on “war to peace transitions”, “peacebuilding” and “post-conflict reconstruction” acknowledges that the world is more complex, convoluted and multi-dimensional, much of the work on post-war contexts continues to struggle with the conceptual and normative difficulties associated with linearity and dichotomy. It has proven difficult to step away from the teleological and interventionist foundations of the received understanding of “war to peace transition”.

In line with some of the recent ethnographic work on war and post-war contexts (discussed in chapter 2), this thesis seeks to develop a more empirically grounded approach, describing the transition from war to post-war as it actually unfolds in a specific region. This dissertation looks at a specific, but vital, part of that transition by taking a political geography perspective. It foregrounds four inter-related subjects that play a pivotal role in contemporary armed conflict: identity, politics, the state, and space. This ensemble plays a central role in contemporary armed conflict. There are other important dimensions, of course – such as the economy, military dynamics, international aspects – and I do not contest their relevance. Yet, I posit that the web between identity, politics, the state and space designates an analytical realm that stands at the core of understanding today’s wars. Almost invariably, the politics of identity is centrally important and this in turn involves contestation over the nature of the state (and sovereignty) and/or territory (and homeland). In addition to the obvious political questions about power, coercion, rule and order, this raises more existential, affective questions on issues of belonging, legitimacy and authority. These questions are at the heart of many contemporary conflicts.

Importantly, these concerns do not lose their importance when war is declared over. Of course, military victories (e.g. in Sri Lanka) and peace agreements (in many other contexts) herald a major reconfiguration of the playing field, but collective identities, political antagonism between them identity groups, the nature of the state, and spatial claims continue to play a salient role. People continue to grapple with the questions who they are, where they belong, and how they are ruled. In fact, it is not uncommon for these questions to become more acute at war endings. In Sri Lanka, this is certainly the case.

The decade studied in this dissertation – 2001 to 2011 – comprised a turbulent part of Sri Lankan history. At the start of the study period, the country had undergone fifty years of political contestation on “the ethnic question” and almost twenty years of separatist war. The militants ran *de facto* state structures in large parts of the northeast. Ethnic fault lines between the Sinhala majority and the Tamil and Muslim minorities had hardened. And poverty, displacement and insecurity pressed heavily on people’s lives. The 2002 ceasefire agreement and the subsequent peace talks brought about major changes, but did not lead to a peace agreement. The process gradually collapsed and war resumed in 2006 with an army offensive on the east coast. Unlike previous episodes of the war, the government cornered the LTTE in the subsequent three years and the rebels were defeated in May 2009. This victory came at the cost of a human massacre, however, and rather than opening up space for pro-minority reform, the military success fuelled Sinhala nationalism. Also, the development efforts of Sri Lanka’s triumphant government worked to consolidate its power in the minority-dominated northeast.

The Sri Lankan conflict is well studied and recent events have not escaped scholarly attention. There are insightful analyses of the country’s present regime, the domestic political dynamics around it, critical reviews of development efforts and Sri Lanka’s international relations (for discussion and references see chapter 3). Scholarly and policy-oriented debate often has a tendency to gravitate towards Colombo (the regime) and to a lesser extent the north (the Tamil heartland). This dissertation focuses on the east coast, which distinguishes itself from other parts of the island. It is the most multi-ethnic region, with similar shares of the three main population groups: Tamil and Muslims interspersed along the coast and the Sinhalese living mostly in the interior. The east has historically been a borderland rather than itself a centre of power and this continued to be true throughout the war as well as today. Within the east, my articles focus on two specific regions: the areas around Akkaraipattu and Trincomalee. The former is a Tamil-Muslim town in the south of the Eastern Province. The latter is a tri-ethnic district (and town) in the north of the province.

The four articles that form the core of this dissertation describe and analyse parts of the overall transition in eastern Sri Lanka. They are neither ethnographic village studies, nor macro-level case studies. Rather, each of the articles aims to connect ground-level ethnographic insight with broader developments in relation to a specific theme. As shown in the thumbnail summaries below, these themes

correspond with the four central subjects introduced earlier – identity, politics, the state and space – through there is some overlap between these subjects.

The first article looks at Sri Lanka's third largest and least studied community: the Muslims. The article asserts that the war has made Muslim identity of paramount importance, but it this has also divided them. Politicians, mosque leaders, Sufis and Tablighis define the ethnic, religious and political dimensions of "Muslimness" differently. This leads to intra-Muslim contradictions and a complicated political landscape: the Muslims jockey between principled politics, pragmatic politics and anti-politics to navigate these different strands of identity.

Muslim identity politics outlasted the war. This is corroborated in the second article, which studies the first post-war parliamentary elections. Rather than just an arithmetic exercise over the composition of government, the political work of elections exposes more fundamental political narratives in society. People are used to managing divergent political loyalties in everyday life, but elections compress these layers into one event and one vote. And therefore, they force people to show their colours and this causes tension, turns of the plot, and disruption.

The third article shifts the attention to people's other key interlocutor with the state: civil servants. During the war, Sri Lanka's civil service was locked between the central government and the LTTE, but preserved the appearance of bureaucratic order. The collapse of the LTTE ended a time of intimidation and shortages, but also took away the counterweight against controversial government and political interference. "Normal Sri Lankan politics" came in with full vigour after the war. The article thus highlights important post-war changes, but takes issue with the stereotype that equates war with state collapse and state-building with post-war recovery.

The fourth article engages explicitly with the spatial dimension of post-war transition. It brings forward a wide array of post-war changes – resettlement, sacred sites and military zones, tourist arrivals, and changing patterns in religious conduct, youth behaviour and shifting social morals – and argues these are best understood as a process of re-territorialisation. This perspective shows that the end of the war brought mobility and security, but also new forms of (mainly Sinhala) domination and youths hanging out on junctions, getting drunk or

watching pornography, now that they were no longer so closely policed by the military, the LTTE, religious leaders or their fathers.

These four articles do not comprise four logical steps of one argument. They are tailored to different journals, audiences, debates and literatures. Combining the four constitutive parts of this PhD therefore involves some leapfrogging between sites, subjects and levels. To put it euphemistically, this leaves plenty of room for further research. However, the shifting between different viewpoints and perspectives enables us to cover a wide range of inter-connected issues, without altogether sacrificing the fine-grained empirical narrative. In doing so, this dissertation opens up space to rethink the transition from war to post-war in a non-teleological and non-interventionist manner. Rather than foregrounding normative or reductive schemata and prescriptive outcomes, it tries to make sense of the changes and continuities that actually occur in a region that emerges from two decades of war. This draws our attention to the less predictable processes, to the issues that escape the received frames of the conflict. Examples are the important role of globalised Islamic movements (article 1), counter-intuitive shifts in the political landscape (article 2), the increase of political interference with the civil service after the war (article 3), and the anxiety about threats to cultural purities and traditions after the war (article 4). And it protects us against privileging the conflict; against the idea that wartime society, politics and the state are fundamentally different or oppositional to an (ill-defined) situation of "peace". War does not altogether suspend the concepts and theories of social science. There are few fundamental differences between wartime and post-war eastern Sri Lanka with regard to identity politics, group antagonism, the enactment of the state and spatial contestation. But these processes are re-articulated in the transition. This involves major changes of cast, bargaining positions, boundary activation, redefined relations and so on, but stark dichotomies between war and peace, order and disorder, violence and politics are ill-suited to make sense of these re-articulations.

This introduction has skimmed over complex debates and contextual nuances in order to provide the reader with a bold summary of my dissertation. The following four chapters aim to conceptualise and contextualise my four articles more thoroughly. Chapter 2 clarifies the conceptual foundations of my four central subjects – identity, politics, the state and space – and connects them to a non-teleological understanding of post-war transition. Chapter 3 offers a more thorough introduction to the Sri Lankan context, the historic background of the

war and the specific characteristics of the east coast. Chapter 4 concerns methodology. In addition to a basic review of my methods and data, it discusses the methodological challenges and ethical dilemmas of undertaking a rather wide-ranging study in a war-torn area. Finally, chapter 5 succinctly weaves these issues together through a summary of the four articles, before we proceed to the most important component of this document: the articles themselves (part II).

Chapter 2

A political geography perspective on war endings

2.1 Introduction

War endings are dramatic historical turning points. The annals of history are not troubled by a shortage of famous battles and treaties that marked the end of war, either under the banner of victory or peace, or a combination of both. Often these historic dates and events are plentifully invested with political energy and symbolism. They are cherished, celebrated and commemorated as the start of a new era. It is clear, however, that war endings are not simply a breakpoint where everything is new and different. Many of the conditions, experiences, emotions, antagonisms and power relations that characterise times of war do not simply disappear with a stroke of the pen on a peace treaty or terms of capitulation. And even if there are major changes, they do not necessarily fit well with the post-war script of the dawn of a new era, of the birth a new society, of peace and prosperity. Perhaps it is for that reason that people often spend so much energy marking the end of war: to keep in place the symbolic date that separates a before and an after, rendering the former "war" and the latter "peace". I have no intention to ridicule the significance of war endings, or the importance of commemorating them, but this hard discursive work aimed at forcing history into a plot with clearly delineated categories of war and peace begs for a closer look at what actually happens in a society emerging from war. What actually changes, and what does not? What accounts for these changes and continuities, and how can we make sense of them?

Clearly, these questions are not purely academic. The human consequences of armed conflict are large and wide-ranging: scores of people living in insecurity, poverty, and deplorable conditions, high economic costs, diseases, displacement, the spread of crime, terrorism and government oppression (Collier et al. 2003;

Ghobarah et al. 2003). And armed conflicts cast a lengthy shadow over the future. Not only, because the devastating effects of war last long, but also because post-war countries are prone to a relapse into resumed warfare (Dixon 2009; Doyle and Sambanis 2000; Sarkees 2000).¹ This “post-war condition” is not an exceptional phenomenon. Though the exact number of course depends on how long we continue to call a country post-war, it is safe to say this condition applies to large parts of the world, particularly in the global South. According to the latest statistics of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (Themnér and Wallensteen, 2011), there were thirty active armed conflicts in 2010, including both “war” and “minor conflicts”.² Over the past three decades this number has fluctuated between thirty and fifty-three, about two-thirds of them taking place in Africa and Asia.³ The vast majority of these are intra-state conflicts – typically asymmetrical conflicts between a government and one or more non-state groups – but their dynamics and consequences often permeate national borders.

This thumbnail sketch conceals the diversity and contextual variance of today’s armed conflicts, but it suffices to make the basic point: they are a pressing human problem that warrants academic attention. That attention has increased over the past two decades. Conflict Studies has become an established field of study, which is researched by a range of social sciences and humanities.⁴ Partly for that reason, it is a rather fragmented academic field. Key concepts, underlying theoretical assumptions, commonly quoted authors and analytical conclusions differ and there is often surprisingly little cross-referencing. In addition, there is a sizable applied and policy-oriented literature, which prescribes, describes and evaluates the many interventions taking place in war-torn countries. While this is understandable in view of the human suffering sketched above, an overly teleological approach to analysing war and post-war societies poses some major problems, a point we return to in section 2.6.

This dissertation takes a political geography perspective on the turbulent transition in eastern Sri Lanka. In relation to the study of armed conflicts, however, political geography does not denote an approach that is either

¹ This is particularly so when war was terminated with a negotiated settlement. Military victories are less prone to such re-escalations, but they often come at a high price: violent massacres, or even genocide (Dixon 2009; Doyle and Sambanis 2000; Sarkees 2000).

² The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) defines armed conflicts as: a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year. In this database, “wars” are conflicts with over 1000 fatalities per year; conflicts with lower death rates are categorised as “minor conflicts”.

³ Even when the Middle East is excluded, as a separate region.

⁴ Including political science, sociology, geography, (social) psychology, anthropology, military science, and economics, as well as research under the rubric of area studies, international relations and development studies, which are themselves study fields rather than academic disciplines. Jolle Demmers’ recently published book (2012) presents a useful overview.

consolidated, or completely distinct from other disciplines. This chapter clarifies what I mean with a political geography perspective. I will explore this perspective on the basis of the four concepts that have assumed prominence in this dissertation, in shorthand: identity, politics, the state and space. There are close connections between these four terms. Group identities, political struggle, and state power are mutually constitutive, at least to some extent. And all of them have spatial ramifications; they often imply territorial claims. They are autonomous concepts, however, and as such they are steeped in different literatures, which requires us to reach out across disciplinary boundaries.

Rather than an encyclopaedic summary of these foundational terms, this chapter explores each of these concepts in relation to armed conflict. However, I have deliberately avoided putting war in the conceptual foreground and treat identity, politics, the state and space as four constituents of it. That would amount to privileging armed conflict as an altogether special condition that warrants its own version of established social science concepts. In turn, this would reify the above-questioned suggestion that war can be clearly delineated from “normal” or “peaceful” societies. And the end of war would subsequently confront us with a conceptual problem: if concepts like identity and politics were operationalised as ingredients of war, we would have to rediscover them once the war is over.

Instead, this chapter treats the four pillars of a political geography perspective mentioned above as more fundamental aspects of human society, which assume particular importance and get re-articulated with the ebb and flow of armed conflict. This is particularly important when our central concern is to unravel a region’s transition from conditions of war to a post-war situation. In brief, I posit that we should not understand people’s identities, political antagonism, the enactment of state authority, and spatial claims and boundaries in fundamentally different ways. Rather, we should preserve our conceptual foundations to explore: how identities and struggles about them get re-asserted in similar or different ways; how political antagonisms are reconfigured and re-channelled when violence subsides, and new actors and issues assume importance; how public authority and patterns of rule get recalibrated when bargaining positions and norms of legitimacy change; and how the political landscape gets re-territorialised through changing claims and demarcation of spaces, boundary (de-)activation, and the forging and severing of spatial connections.

We return to these reflections at the end of this chapter. I start out with discussing the four concepts which are central to my understanding of a political geography perspective – identity, politics, the state and space. These concepts roughly match with the four core articles of this dissertation (see Part II). The following four sections thus have some overlap with the conceptual discussions in each of these articles. The sections in this chapter are more elaborate, however, and they make a more systematic effort at connecting the different conceptual terrains. Subsequently, the chapter explores the application of these conceptual discussions to what I have coined “post-war transition”.

2.2 Identity, ethnicity and nationalism

Identity is a commonsensical term and yet when we try to pin it down, it proves hopelessly elusive. Rogers Brubaker (2004) argues the term identity tends to either mean too much or too little. It implies too much when we define it as a substantive category. It is overly essentialist to suppose that identity comprises a set of characteristics that people simply have. At closer scrutiny, we are unable to explain what those common characteristics really are, why they trump minor differences, and why they receive different emphases in different contexts. Alternatively, Brubaker argues identity means too little when we see it as merely constructed, multiple, unstable, fragmented and negotiated. Constructivism makes identity theoretically useless when it makes the term so elastic that it accounts for anything (Brubaker 2004: 37-41). The paradox of identity is thus that it is on one hand an indisputably constructed category – layered, defined in opposition to others and context dependent – but on the other hand it is deeply existential and often remarkably persistent. Without scrapping the term altogether, Brubaker suggests that for analytical purposes it makes more sense to use associated concepts, like identification and categorisation.

Brubaker’s work is particularly useful with regard to ethnicity. Although ethnic identities allude to genealogy, homeland and cultural tradition, it is clear that the notion of ethnicity is much younger than the supposedly ancient genealogies it claims to capture. And its importance has not diminished over time: globalisation has not done away with ethnic identities, contested genealogies and turf battles over territorial belonging (Bauman 2000). The term ethnicity often carries clear political implications – demarcating a group as separate and imbued with certain inalienable rights – but it often remains a bit fuzzy what exactly makes an ethnic community. Fredrik Barth’s seminal work “Ethnic groups and boundaries” (1969)

took issue with this question and turned the puzzle on its head by arguing it is the boundary, not the stuff that it encloses, that defines an ethnic group. Ethnicity thus becomes the result of people's continuous processes of exclusion and inclusion. By implication, ethnic identities are relational: they require an outside, an other.

This conceptualisation continues to have much purchase. Yet, the apparent irrelevance of the substantive characteristics of ethnicity – the suggestion that these categories are a mere by-product of boundary-making processes – remained a source of scholarly discomfort. As aptly phrased by Isaacs, defining ethnicity is like a safari to track down a snowman: everyone says it exists, but no one knows what exactly it looks like (Isaacs 1975, quoted in Le Vine 1997: 49). For those attempting to capture this snowman, Anthony Smith provides us with a basic identification. Ethnicity, he outlines, encompasses "a named human population with a myth of common ancestry, shared memories, and cultural elements; a link with a historic territory or homeland; and a measure of solidarity." (Smith 1993: 28) Notice the constructivist buffers – myth, link, measure – in relation to the main substantive elements: genealogy, spatial belonging and cultural sameness. Ethnicity is as much about interpreting history as it is born from history, it is as much about claiming territory as it is about inhabiting it, and it is as much about celebrating cultural traditions as it is about culture traits. Ethnic groups, to speak with Brubaker, are not "things in the world", but "perspectives on the world" (2004: 17), and these perspectives are often politically charged. Yet, on the other hand, ethnicity is not just a political play ball. It cannot simply be engineered. Stuart Hall (whose concept of articulation will feature later in this chapter) points out that conceptualising ethnicity also means recognising that "we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, without being contained by that position [...]." (Hall 1996a: 447) Ethnic identity is thus also a dispositional term, a situated subjectivity (Brubakers 2004: 44). Even if ethnicity is a constructed category, it has enduring effects on the way people understand themselves in relation to others, and it carries real implications for people's lives.

These views resonate with the literature on an associated group identity: nations. Rather than the "awakening of nations to self-consciousness," Ernest Gellner argues, nationalism "*invents* nations where they do not exist" (1964: 169, my emphasis). Nations, to use Anderson's famous wording, are thus "imagined

political communities" (2006 [1983]: 6). But this imagining and inventing does not emerge endogenously. Rather than an innate sense of community, nationalism is closely tied up with larger, structural transformations of society, be it state formation (Mann 1996; Tilly 1994), the emergence of print capitalism (Anderson 2006 [1983]), or industrialisation and modernity (Gellner 2006 [1983]). In relation to the global South these – largely modernist – accounts have been accused of orientalism: pasting western-centric labels on what were in fact more locally-driven processes. Subaltern scholars like Partha Chatterjee (in a critique of Anderson) have asked: "If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain 'modular' forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine? [...] Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized." (Chatterjee 1999 [1993]: 5) This opens up a whole set of issues, grievances and controversies about colonial labels, their accuracy and their political implications. And it underlines the need to look quite carefully at the historical interplay – between colonisers and colonised, between modernist schemes and the communities undergoing them – in producing and reifying group categories, like nation and ethnicity.

Identity groups, nationalism and ethnic boundaries play a salient role in theories about the occurrence of armed conflict. Some of the pioneers in the field of Conflict Studies sought the causal background of wars in grievances and inequalities between ethnic, regional, religious or other groups. Tedd Gurr's "why men rebel" (1970), Donald Horowitz' work on ethnic groups (2000 [1985]), and Edward Azar's "protracted social conflict" (1990) are the best-known foundational studies in this line of thought (for more elaborate discussion, see Demmers 2012). Though there are some differences between them, these studies stand united in taking collective human needs, group inequalities and relative deprivation as the analytical starting point. Subsequently they look at the available channels of addressing these grievances non-violently and the feasibility of armed resistance, which brings us to the role of the state, international linkages, and finally to historical contingencies – triggers or turning points – to explain why conflicts evolved into violent clashes or not. Much in line with the preceding reflections and caveats around identity, ethnicity and nationalism, this body of work reiterates that group identities are not a given. They are relational social constructs. Inter-group dynamics and perceptions thus play an important

role⁵: it is only when groups identify others as antagonists, or even as the cause of their grievances, that conflict actually escalates. By consequence, group identities and the hardened fault lines between them are often as much an outcome of conflict as they are a cause. Conflicts re-articulates identities and violence hardens fault lines, Zygmunt Baumann (2000) suggest. His work, in turn, draws from René Girard's (1979) theory on how violence bolsters the creation and perseverance of people's sense of community.⁶

Rather than explaining war as the result of ancient hatreds between primordial identity groups, we thus need to explore the way collective identities get politically mobilised around real group differences like economic inequality. The emphasis on identity *politics*, rather than just in the differences between identity groups, certainly has some traction in Sri Lanka. Scholarly analyses of Sri Lanka's war shirk the term "ethnic conflict" (thus rejecting that ethnicity itself is the problem) and point to the political mobilisation and instrumentalisation of ethnic identities. Political leaders engaged in "ethnic outbidding" to generate electoral support (Herring 2003; Moore 1985; Stokke and Uyangoda 2011).

The salience of ethnicity in Sri Lanka's political discourse is as much an explanation of the country's ill-fated history as it is a source of puzzlement. After all, one encounters many different kinds of identity categories in eastern Sri Lanka: nation (used either for all Sri Lankans or for an ethnic group), ethnicity (most saliently Sinhala and Tamil, but including the religious category Muslim and several smaller groups as well), religion (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam Christianity; and their numerous sub-divisions), as well as class, caste, and kudi (kinship groups).⁷ All of them shape people's life and all these categories have lent themselves to rivalry and – smaller or larger – conflicts. Though many of these and other divides continue to play a role in Sri Lanka (see article 1 and 2), rivalry along ethnic lines has surfaced as the "master cleavage" (to use Kalyvas' term: 2006). Sri Lankan nationalism never emerged as a unifying anti-colonial movement, the way it did in India and many other countries. Other struggles – Marxist class mobilisation, religious anxieties – have not been absent, but they have often moulded with the ethnic frame. In short, we may say Sri Lanka evinces a lack of island-wide nationalism and a surplus of what we may call ethno-nationalism. Clearly, the difference between nation and ethnicity is as

⁵ For early work on these aspects, see Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (1981), discussed in Demmers (2012; chapter 2).

⁶ Useful overviews are provided by Demmers (2012) and Brubaker (2004).

⁷ Rogers (1994) provides an insightful review of these different identity categories in Sri Lanka, including their contested political histories and an interrogation of how the meaning of prevalent labels and categories has changed over time.

much a contested political boundary as an analytical divide. It is for example no coincidence that politically savvy Tamil separatists refer to the Tamils as a nation (rather than merely an ethnic group), thus invoking a sense of legitimate self-determination. This reminds us we should not just look at the identity unit or layer that causes all the trouble, but ask ourselves why this construction prevails over others. It underlines the need to scrutinise the labels and supposed naturalness of the identities that play a salient role in the conflict. Different kinds of identities and the tension between different kinds of antagonism continue to play a role in Sri Lanka, before, during and after the war. And as will be elaborated in article 1 and 2, the political work that gets invested in letting one kind of antagonism prevail over the other tells us a lot about eastern Sri Lanka's present transition.

2.3 Politics, the political and political violence

While the previous section showed that the step from identity to identity politics is a small one, this section comes from the opposite side of the equation. It interrogates the term politics more systematically, directs our attention to "the political" and political violence, and this will bring us back to the issue of group identities, antagonism and boundaries. A commonsensical understanding of politics refers to public policy and the dialogue, debate, polemic or conflict about how that policy should be shaped. It also has a negative connotation. Labelling something political discredits it as a dirty game of tricks and politicking between power-hungry people. Politics, in both connotations, is primarily the realm of professionals: politicians, parliamentarians, ministers, and party cadre. While these aspects are important, this dissertation takes a different angle, taking inspiration Chantal Mouffe's work (2005) and Jonathan Spencer's application of it to the South Asian context (2003; 2007; 2008).

Along with other scholarly proponents of "radical democracy", Mouffe puts antagonism at the centre of her conceptualisation of politics. "The political", she posits, is inevitably about group identities, about separating us from them. Conflict, if not always a luring possibility, is therefore always possible; the us-them divide easily becomes one of adversaries: friends against foes. Rather than the result of clashing interests (which could be resolved by compromise or consensus-seeking), such antagonism is inevitable according to Mouffe. The rivalries over group identities and boundaries discussed in the previous section are thus not a disturbing factor that enters into politics; neither are they an

autonomous domain in society that gets infused with politics; they are at the heart of what politics is. So-called radical democrats like Mouffe strongly draw from the German political theorist Carl Schmitt. Notwithstanding his despised compromise with the early days of German Nazism, Schmitt's analytical critique on liberalism has thus re-entered the scholarly arena. Schmitt argued that liberalism negates the very essence of politics by taking the individual as the ultimate point of reference.⁸ Politics is thus not the realm of consensus-seeking between rational individuals working towards optimal solutions, because in Schmitt's view collective political identities, the formation of an "us", defined in opposition to a "them" cannot be circumvented this way. What is presented as a consensus, Schmitt observes, is always based on exclusion. Rather than the triumph of universal reason, consensus is in fact just another expression of an us-them divide.

Mouffe adopts this critique on liberalism to counter more recent theorists like John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. Though coming from rather different angles, both these authors advocate a deliberational model of democracy. They insist on the capacity of rational decision-making and dialogue to overcome differences and seek political compromise. Mouffe argues this is an illusion, because antagonism is constitutive of society itself. She takes issue with the apparent dissolution of left-right opposition in many European countries in the 1990s. Countering her contemporaries Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, she vehemently opposes the "Third Way" associated with Tony Blair's government in the United Kingdom and attributes the rise of right wing extremists to the so-called "post-political" tendencies of European governments to seek the middle ground. Though Mouffe's argument has spurred quite some academic debate, not least in political geography, her view on politics is arguably somewhat extreme and cynical. As recently argued by Clive Barnett (2011), the focus on antagonism seems to erase all the other manifestations of politics. After all, rational deliberation, consensus-seeking, and clientelism have not disappeared from the earth's surface.

Despite these notes of caution and criticism, Mouffe's reinterpretation of Schmitt remains a useful signpost to depart from a purely interest-based interpretation of politics, and politicise out understanding of democracy (Harriss et al. 2004). Recent anthropological explorations into democratic politics remind us that a purely rational conceptualisation is a little "threadbare" (Banerjee 2008: 73), not

⁸ The commonly cited work is Schmitt's (1932) "Der Begriff des Politischen" (the concept of the political), but I am drawing on Mouffe's summary of Schmitt here (2005).

to say intellectually bankrupt (Spencer 2007: 181). Sri Lankan politics, and South Asian politics more generally, have little in common with the rise of right-wing populism after European social-democrats embraced the Third Way, still less with the short-lived tragedy of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Nazism, but Mouffe's and Schmitt's basic postulate on group identities – the divide between us and them – has much relevance. Of course, ideological preferences and rational weighing of interests play a role, but people's sense of belonging with one group or party and their antipathies to other ones is not just a result of that. There are more existential questions of identity and belonging at stake. In line with the discussion in the previous section, boundaries and divides are centrally important to ethnicity and other forms of identity. Group identities require an other, an outside, and are therefore always prone to rivalry and antagonism. This opens up a stimulating field of political analysis.

Firstly, it brings into focus the ceremonial and symbolic qualities of politics, which dramatise and reproduce societal boundaries, affinities and moral registers. Several authors have explored politics from a ritual perspective (Banerjee 2008; 2011; Bertrand et al. 2007; Coles 2004; Cupples 2009; Dunn 1980; Edelman 1985 [1964]; Lukes 1975; Paley 2008; Pemberton 1986). These authors gaze beyond the formal and designated sites of politics to include the more exciting aspects of the political: the cunning plots and climaxes, the lightning speeches and polemics, the aesthetics and imagery of political power and orientations, the relentless jokes about political leaders, the victories and humiliation, the moments of transgression and indignation. After all, a discussion on the separation of powers, the rule of law and electoral systems is obviously too narrow to capture the scenes of local village politicians dancing in their sarongs, Indian movie-star politicians and other political idolatry, resulting in funerals adorned with processions of elephants and camels, to use some of Spencer's examples (2007). Among other things, this directs us to the analogies and inter-connections between religion and politics. For example, there are religious dimensions to the dignity and decorum with which people register to vote in what Banerjee calls "sacred elections" (2008), and there are some striking similarities between African "witchdoctors" and "spin-doctors" (Geschiere 2003). As is elaborated in article 1, such viewpoints shed rather more critical light on the normative and empirical foundations of recent debates on secularism (and the associated controversies over Islam and politics). More generally, the focus on the ritual and symbolic aspects of politics is helpful in unravelling the articulation and re-articulation of collective identities, the making and re-making of us-them

boundaries. It helps elucidate how political behaviour endorses and legitimises certain practices and structural arrangements.

Secondly, the conceptualisation of politics as antagonism is useful in grappling with questions of crisis and armed conflict. It helps diffuse the false dichotomies between democratic politics and violent rebellion, between the formal politics of parliamentary debate and the much less orderly rowdiness of political rallies, between rational-consensus seeking and the theatrical qualities of election time. Formal politics remain important of course – for example, discriminatory policies are bound to contribute to conflict – but the emphasis on antagonism and group rivalry opens up more encompassing and fertile ground to explore how violent contestation emerges from a society. It thickens the plot of how countries get drawn into war. The historical summaries we encounter in news reports and policy briefings commonly include some variation on the chronological sequence of heated parliamentary debates, unruly street protests, and military escalation. These may indeed be key events in the evolvment of political violence, but such summaries are bound to simplify the intricate existential questions and the layered socio-political rivalries in which these chronologies are embedded. Widening our scope to include the more fine-grained processes of constituting and reifying collective political identities, the framing of others, the interaction between leaders and their constituencies produces a more insightful view on the onslaught of armed conflict.

This is eloquently elucidated in Jonathan Spencer's "Anthropology, politics, and the state" (2007) which draws strongly on the Sri Lankan case. In this thoughtful book, Spencer reserves a central place for the political in understanding how and why Sri Lanka slipped into a devastating war. Village politics, the hardening of political identities, inflammatory political speeches, and electoral violence are more closely related to the 1983 anti-Tamil pogroms and LTTE suicide bombers than most Sri Lankans care to admit. Ethno-nationalism and violent confrontation spurred by it are not interruptions or impediments to politics, they are an intricate part of it. Steeped in a more general analysis of violence and politics in South Asia, Spencer argues "collective violence should not be treated as a departure from the flow of the political". It is not simply a breakdown of democratic contestation. Rather, violence "should be analysed as the heightened and intensified continuation of normal politics." (Spencer 2007: 120) Building on Mouffe (and Schmitt), Spencer argues this does not only apply to the incidents around election rallies, the intimidation around polling booths, and the thuggery

around politicians, but more fundamentally to the constitution of society and the causal background of war. "In the end," he states, "it was not capitalism, globalization, neo-liberalism, or class conflict, still less ethnicity, culture, or religion that sent Sri Lanka spiralling into civil war in the early 1980s. If it was one thing, it was the political." (Spencer 2007: 181)

Far from a passionate outburst or a loss of control, violence makes socio-political sense. Riots, violent protests and targeted killings are often part of larger moral dramas about us-them divides, about demarcating or purifying territory, about showing who is in charge (Appadurai 2006; Brass 2003; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Goodhand et al. 2009; Spencer 2007; Tambiah 1996). While most ethnographic work describes smaller-scale violence like riots or criminal violence, these views do not lose their relevance in the war zone, not only because this kind of violence often continues, but also because the violence deployed by more institutionalised armies often takes equally theatrical forms. In Sri Lanka, the LTTE's suicide bombers, the targeted assassination of dissidents, the deliberate desecration of sacred sites, rape, and violence aimed to dramatise ethnic geographies were common examples. Often, the larger picture of military combat blends with more localised projects of boundary making. This brings us to a more geographical literature on "warscapes"⁹, the convoluted geographies of violence and competing spatial claims, both in Sri Lanka (Brun and Jazeel 2009; Goodhand et al. 2009; Korf 2006b; Korf et al. 2010a) and in other war-torn countries (e.g. Falah 2003; Lubkemann 2008; Lunstrum 2009; Moore 2005). We return to this in section 2.5.

While these reflections corroborate the conceptual purchase of putting antagonism at the centre of politics, they also imply a significant break with Mouffe's work. A rigid interpretation of "us" and "them" determined by the classical (and largely Western-centric) left-right division fails to capture the convoluted forms of rivalry, contestation, and boundary-making discussed above. The discussion on nationalism and ethnicity (along with caste, class, and clan) in section 2.2 underlined the many different kinds of identity. By consequence there are many kinds of "us" and "them", and different kinds antagonism, which do not necessarily work towards the same ends (Yuval-Davis 2010; as well as Article 2). This makes the political landscape a whole lot more complicated and unstable. Putting different kinds of identity in place and letting certain kinds of antagonism prevail over others requires hard political work of forging bonds and boundaries,

⁹ Interestingly, the term warscape stems from the anthropological literature on societies at war. It was coined Nordstrom (1997) and derived from Appadurai's (1996) "ethnoscape" (along with other "scapes").

affirming and de-activating affinities and celebrating or challenging moral registers or purity and belonging.

2.4 The state, authority and sovereignty

The state has lingered in the background in the preceding discussions on identity and politics. The construction of collective identities (nationalism in particular) is often associated with the state, and politics (even when understood as societal antagonism) cannot be disconnected from state structures, policies and power. The state seems to assert a natural presence in so many walks of public life. Yet, that naturalness is precisely what makes it puzzling. The British comedian group Monty Python illustratively denaturalise the state in an encounter between king Arthur and one of his supposed subjects of rule, in their film *the Holy Grail*.¹⁰

Arthur: How do you do, good lady. I am Arthur, King of the Britons. [...]

Woman: King of the who?

Arthur: The Britons.

Woman: Who are the Britons?

Arthur: Well, we all are. We are all Britons, and I am your king.

Woman: I didn't know we had a king.

Authors like Michel Foucault and James Scott needed weighty tomes to make the point that Arthur, our baffled anti-hero, exemplifies. At some point down the line, some people asserted sovereignty by turning others into citizens, by turning land into territory, by turning goods into taxable commodities, and by turning conventions into laws. The fact that the inhabitants of this land have come to think this is natural tells us not that it *is* natural, but rather that subjectivation has become so pervasive that it requires little overt enforcement. Sovereignty thus embodies the normalisation (and legalisation) of supreme political authority in a demarcated territory over a particular group of people. This authority is supreme in the sense that it exercises force with impunity; it enforces discipline over people – in its extreme form: capital punishment – without itself facing punitive measures (Hansen and Stepputat 2006). Such authority simultaneously works to exclude external projections of force, typically legitimised by claims to self-determination born from people's self-definition as a group, which has historically inhabited a given homeland. However, keeping the foregoing discussion of Gellner's invented nations and Anderson's imagined communities in

¹⁰ Monty Python (1974) "Monty Python and the Holy Grail", Scene 3. King Arthur is a mythical figure featuring in stories from early medieval Britain.

mind, we are led to conclude that it is not the nature of people and their genealogy that define sovereignty, but rather the projection of sovereignty that defines and reifies a people and their interpretation of history. The state, in turn, is not the institutionalised embodiment of sovereign power over an autonomous people, but rather a historically grown amalgam of institutions, ideas and practices that have helped craft not only the idea of sovereignty, but also articulated people's collective identity (i.e. a nation), and subjected their conduct to an order that is perceived as natural and – to some extent – legitimate.

In recent years, a body of work spanning political sociology and anthropology has attempted to fathom the state in more contextualised ways. These writings depart from the idea that the state is a unified entity (let alone an actor) that is supreme or otherwise separate from society. Philip Abrams was a forerunner here in arguing that: "the state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is." (Abrams 1988 [1977]: 82) The state *as a coherent and rational actor* only exists as an idea, a discourse. The actual ensemble of institutions and practices that carry the state insignia is much more convoluted. Those discourses, institutions and practices are not placed outside society, but are continuously articulated and enacted by actors rooted in that society. In another seminal article, Timothy Mitchell argues that the "appearance of a world fundamentally divided into state and society" is itself an effect of the "spatial organization, temporal arrangement, functional specification, and supervision and surveillance" that we attribute to the state (Mitchell 1991: 95). The state, in other words, is neither an essentiality, nor a mere abstraction; it is an effect of all the above activities. In similar vein, several authors have undertaken empirical ethnographic efforts to unravel how the state-idea and state practices get produced and negotiated in everyday life (Corbridge et al. 2005; Das and Poole 2004; Fuller and Bénédicte 2001; Gupta 1995; Hansen 2001b; Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Joseph and Nugent 1994; Migdal 2001; Migdal and Schlichte 2002; Spencer 2007).

It may be a myth that the state is the coherent institutional embodiment of sovereignty that hangs above the fray of society, but that myth remains crucially important. The state idea is remarkably persistent in people's discursive ordering of society and the qualities they attribute to state performance. Even when people's everyday encounter with the state is at loggerheads with this discourse, their ideas and expectations of what the state is supposed to be inform and

structure society in numerous ways. The state and its many tentacles are apparently such an important discursive hallmark, that people have difficulty imagining their society without it and this equips state structures, officials and policies with an aura of legitimacy, authority and naturalness that can not be explained otherwise (Abrams 1988 [1977]; Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Mitchell 1991). This is why the state insigne embodies not only *Macht* (power), but also *Herrschaft* (authority) – to use Weber’s classic distinction – and it helps explain why Pierre Bourdieu (who builds on Weber) attributed special qualities to the state (*capital étatique*, a conflation of several other forms of capital).¹¹ These terms allude to the symbolic power that is vested in the institutions (e.g. offices, positions, procedures), the services and resources (e.g. assistance, payments, licenses) and the discourse (e.g. rendering technical, symbols legitimizing rule) of the state.

The above observations suggest that state institutions punch above their weight, because people attribute perseverance and indispensability to them. Importantly, this pervasive presence of the state does not work towards one singular end, furthering one singular agenda. As readers of Gramsci point out, hegemony is never complete (Li 2007; Mouffe 2005; Sayer 1994). Where there is domination, there is resistance too, but while it is tempting to associate the state with domination, and non-state opposition with resistance, that dichotomy is overly blunt. The authority vested in state institutions, resources and discourse is not a monopoly. The orderly images and practices of the state can be employed for multiple agendas. Rather than the exclusive privilege of governments, they are available to anyone with sufficient power to use them. By the same token, sovereignty is not the prerogative state power. Other actors may project social orderings, disciplinary measures and registers of legitimate rule. “*De facto* sovereignty” (Hansen and Stepputat 2006), or “social sovereignty” (Latham 2000) may in fact take many forms. The armed insurgencies to which we will turn below are one example, but there are in fact many other claims to sovereignty that work across state boundaries or within the interstices of state institutions.

Tania Li’s work on Indonesia is helpful here (1999; 2005; 2007). Taking issue with the homogenizing overtones of the literature on the state and domination, she points out that state notions and practices are themselves enmeshed with processes and forms of resistance. Li quotes Derek Sayer (1994) to point out that it is “very rarely a question of ‘the state’ *here* and resistance *there*” (1999: 316,

¹¹ For a succinct overview, see Hansen and Stepputat (2001).

emphasis in Sayer's original). The "actual accomplishment of rule", she points out, is highly "contingent" and "compromised" (295). State authority does not just lie with the central government to work its way down; it is challenged and compromised by other agents endowed with power – local big men, rebel movements, traditional chiefs and so on. When observed from close by, the discourse, institutions and practices of the state do not destroy, but deploy agency. They do not end or overrule antagonism; they redefine it. We thus need to look more closely at the way people make strategic use of these state institutions, resources and discourses. Christian Lund (2007) provides a useful conceptual springboard to explore this terrain. He builds on Sally Falk Moore and Mary Douglas' concepts of "bricolage" and "institutional leakage" to coin the term "twilight institutions". He points out that different institutions – state and non-state – mix and blend. At one point, people use them to represent the state; the next time around they act in direct contradiction to it. People move from institution to the other, but carry along symbols, authority or rules. Lund observes that many local groups present themselves as the antithesis of the state, but subsequently adopt parts of it as well or use very state-like symbols and strategies.

These reflections on compromised state power, twilight institutions and *de facto* forms of sovereignty pertain to the conceptual core of our thinking on the state, but they are particularly relevant to situations of armed conflict. In fact, these studies bring a welcome set of nuances and conceptual rigour to recent debates on the inter-linkages between war and the state. There is a sizable body of literature that attributes contemporary armed conflicts to the perils of state formation, its contested legitimacy and territorial integrity, and its disability to levy taxes, provide services and security (Ayoob 1995; Cliffe and Luckham 1999; Holsti 1996; Reno 1998; Rotberg 2002, 2003).¹² If sovereignty does not go unquestioned, if a state is unable to secure a monopoly of violence through its territory, if it does not provide effective channels for representation and the resolution of disputes¹³, and if it fails to deliver elementary services – the reasoning goes – people find both reason and opportunity to fend for themselves. And this opens up space for rebel movements to mobilise resources and cultivate

¹² The state's role in providing and preserving order has gained new currency in these debates, but these ideas in fact have a much longer history. Seminal works by Max Weber (for discussion see Nash 2010) and – more recently – Charles Tilly (1992) on the pathologies of European states highlight the close linkages between organising or monopolising violence and state formation.

¹³ The point about representation brings in an associated, but distinct literature on democratic systems and conflict. This research compares different regime types, scrutinises the capacity different designs of democracy (and associated issues of power-sharing, federalism and decentralisation) to resolve conflicts, and highlights the dangers and destabilising effects of democratisation (Horowitz 2000 [1985]; Manning 2008; Mansfield and Snyder 2005; Reilly 2005; Reilly and Reynolds 2000; Tilly 2003).

societal legitimacy (Weinstein 2007). Conversely, the escalation of armed conflict often severely undercuts state functioning and calls into question its ability and legitimacy. It is thus not completely surprising that terms like “state failure”, “state collapse”, or “state fragility” have sprung up (and are still current among some policy-makers¹⁴) in relation to contemporary armed conflict, particularly the more extreme cases like Somalia, Liberia and Afghanistan.

Right from the start, however, there has been much dissatisfaction and academic critique on simplistic diagnoses of war as “state failure” or “collapse” and dichotomic categorisations of weak and strong states. In its starkest terms, the state collapse debate mistakes state capacities for legitimacy, wrongly equates limited state presence with anarchy, it is Eurocentric, and it prescribes undesirable and unfeasible interventions (Chandler 2006; Hagmann and Hoehne 2009; Hagmann and Péclard 2010; Lund 2007; Milliken and Krause 2002; Richmond 2005). While this criticism is grounded, it leaves unimpeded that the idea, the practice and institutions of the state are crucial for understanding contemporary armed conflicts, if we conceptualise them in line with the previously cited literature. Exploring the state as an ensemble of institutions, resources and discourse (which appropriate an aura of naturalness, but lend themselves to multiple use) provides a more nuanced approach to the conflict-state conundrum (Berenschot 2010; Gellner 2007; Hagmann and Peclard 2010; Schroven 2010; Shah and Pettigrew 2009; Vandekerckhove 2011).¹⁵

As elaborated towards the end of this chapter, these reflections on state power, public authority and sovereignty are also helpful in situating international interventions in war-torn countries. In line with the state failure discourse, these efforts are typically branded as “state-building”, “capacity building”, re-establishing “good governance” or reinstating a Weberian “monopoly of violence” (e.g. Brinkerhoff 2010; United Nations 2010). Critical scholars in International Relations and Development Studies have pointed that these interventions evince the idea of a “liberal peace”, while serving Western dominated economic and security agendas (Chandler 2006; Duffield 2001; 2007; Mac Ginty 2008; Paris 2004; Pugh and Cooper 2004; Richmond 2005).¹⁶ Of course, post-war

¹⁴ For a concrete example of how this label is used and operationalised, see the Failed States Index of the American think-tank Fund for Peace at <http://www.fundforpeace.org>.

¹⁵ On a slightly different note, the research by Klaus Schlichte and colleagues has explored armed movements from a political sociology perspective, thus putting social relations, legitimacy and norms at the centre of analysis (Schlichte 2009).

¹⁶ In short, these authors criticise contemporary peace efforts for propagating a world order based on Western-style democracy and a market economy. What is presented as peacebuilding is in fact a form of global governance, which aims to neutralise disturbances. Rather than harmony, these efforts preserve the hegemony and the security interests of the global “haves”.

arrangements are often prone to contestation. What goes for governance is in fact a continuous process of negotiation and shifting alliances between a wide range of actors that wield allegiances and resources. Scholars have coined terms like “mediated state” (Menkhaus 2006), “hybrid order” (Boege et al. 2009) and “political marketplace” (De Waal 2009) to underline that order does not just emanate from the installation of centralised governance. By implication, actors intervening in a conflict zone become players on this marketplace – rather than external arbiters. Like anyone else, they are subject to contextualised politics and power relations.

2.5 Space and territorialisation

The discussion of my conceptual pillars so far – identity, politics and the state – could be labelled as a political sociology approach. I have, however, introduced it as a political *geography* approach, and the main difference lies in the fourth pillar: space. That does not imply that geography has been completely absent from the story thus far. Each of the three preceding concepts has veritable spatial dimensions. The discussion of identity, nationalism and ethnicity (2.2) highlighted the question of belonging and homeland, and it could easily have been larded with a term like “sons of the soil”, “sacred sites” or “holy land”. In turn, section 2.3 on politics and antagonism between “us and them” made reference to boundary-making, the use of political violence to purify or demarcate spaces, and introduced the term warscape as a catchphrase for the convoluted territorial configurations resulting from such violence. The conceptual review of the state and sovereignty (2.4) alluded to territory, and analyses of the state in relation to armed conflict often conjure up associated spatial terms like boundaries, frontiers and – conversely – separatism.

In other words, each of the three conceptual realms is saturated with a spatial lexicon. This leads to the fundamental (but somewhat facile) point that geography matters, and fancy (but somewhat gratuitous) slogans that to think politically is to think spatially. Arguing for a geographical perspective merely on the count that everything is somehow spatial is a cliché, however. The political sociology discussion so far makes useful and insightful points without explicitly entering into geographical debates. In my view, geographers need to argue a little harder to point out which puzzles geography can solve; and solve better than non-geographical analyses. Fortunately – I may say, over three years after I registered as a political geographer – we can.

In synch with the theoretical trends in the preceding three sections, human geography has largely departed from a positivist conceptualisation of space. Rather than a fixed grid on the earth's surface, space is conceived of as a relational concept, produced by human behaviour, subject to human interpretation and therefore also subject to change (Castree 2003; Massey 2005; Migdal 2004; Thrift 2003). Yet, on the other hand, spatial concepts are often remarkably resilient. A place may be a construct, but it also embodies history, it typically does not change overnight and people from that place often carry its bearings (accent, stereotypes, emotional ties) for their whole life. Rather than a cold combination of geo-coordinates, places are associated with personal and collective identities. There is something undeniably local about the term place, but not in the sense that it is an indigenously shaped arena, a cultural autarky, which loses its visceral essence when exposed to the outside. In fact, pretty much any place is strongly permeated by influences from elsewhere. What is local about them is the unique constellation of (often non-local) influences, an un-mirrored "throwntogetherness" (Massey 2005). Places are often defined in relation to other places, which are different. Constructing a place – by the same token – means constructing its outside, and constructing outsiders. The work of Joel Migdal and colleagues (2004) on boundaries is useful here. People's understanding of themselves and their surroundings, the reproduction of "us" and "them", "here" and "there" – so Migdal argues – comes about through "mental maps" and virtual "checkpoints". These metaphors direct us to the way people's everyday practices and understandings reify places and the collective identities enshrined in them.¹⁷

There is some interesting anthropological work that highlights the cultural production of place-making (see for example Appadurai 1996; Gupta and Ferguson 1997). In the Sri Lankan case, this brings into focus a bewildering complexity of high and low caste land, village genealogies, religious divides, ethnic categories, and – as Jonathan Spencer (2003) points out – a fascinating opposition between place and movement. He explores the widespread conviction that migration is a source of moral disorder (building on the work of Michelle Gamburd, 2000, and Gananath Obeyesekere, 1981). Starting out with the opposition between paddy (irrigated rice) and chena (shifting cultivation) – paddy is fixed, pure, hierarchical and in the centre; chena is loose, impure,

¹⁷ For an application of these metaphors to the Sri Lankan context, see our joint article: Goodhand, Klem and Korf (2009). For a specific anthropological discussion of the real and metaphorical role of checkpoints in Sri Lanka see Jeganathan (2004).

uncontrollable and in the periphery – Spencer unravels a wider cultural obsession with movement as an infringement on purity. These observations shed light on a broad range of issues. They make legible the cultural preoccupation with portraying peripheral areas as jungle, as unfixed, uncivilised and morally corrupted places where alcoholism, suicide, crime and rebellion thrive. The place-movement opposition also ties in well with the ethnic discourse of sons of the soil, genealogical claims on regions and the island at large, which tends to discard the ethnic other as intruders, as historical latecomers who ought to know their place. And it sheds light on the cultural anxieties around international exposure and globalisation. While there is nothing altogether new or modern about this, the conception of movement as a source of cultural decay assumed increased importance with the liberalisation of Sri Lanka's economy after 1977. The opening up of the island prompted all kinds of movement, including labour migration (often women working as domestic workers in the Middle East) and the pull towards Free Trade Zones (attracting young rural women working in garment factories). Both spurred moral anxiety and political controversy. Young women were seen to embody cultural tradition and by moving around, they escaped surveillance and were exposed to external influences (Gamburd 2000). Caitrin Lynch's (2004) description of the humour, shame and politico-cultural distress around supposedly innocent and chaste Sinhala village girls in Free Trade Zones sewing lingerie for Western women stands out as a fascinating example. This brief exposé on place, movement and purity may seem like a digression from this chapter's train of thought, but the links with a political geography perspective on war-torn societies are closer than they may seem. There are striking parallels between post-1977 moral panic and some of Sri Lanka's post-war controversies. As described in article 4, the opening up of the east coast (when checkpoints and frontlines disappeared) unleashed an influx of external influences that caused very similar anxieties about preserving local purities and traditions. Alongside these cultural preoccupations, there were minority concerns over changes in the ethnic demography and the consolidation (and militarisation) of state control over the eastern region. That brings us to the next term: territory, and its many derivatives.

Like place, territory taps into questions of identity and belonging, but it adds a dimension of political rule. The term territory itself has military roots. Watts (2003: 15) stipulates that it is derived not only from terra (land), but also from terrere (to frighten). "Territory," as succinctly put by Connolly, "is land occupied by violence" (1996: 144, quoted in Lunstrum 2009: 887), but more

fundamentally, the term ties together conceptions of the state, spatial control and issues of sovereignty. Stuart Elden usefully takes stock of debates on territory, which he defines as a “political technology” that involves mapping, ordering, measuring, demarcating, and the regulation of circulation (Elden 2010; see also Elden 2007). The Foucauldian conceptualisation of territory was pioneered by the Swiss geographer Claude Raffestin, who used the term “territoriality”, a conflation of territory and governmentality.¹⁸ This line of thought suggests that spatial morphology is an expression of power; it closely related to the formation and sustenance of state authority, governance and surveillance (Elden 2010; Fall 2007; Johnston 2001).¹⁹

As became clear in the discussion on state authority, government rule is never absolute; it gets enacted and reproduced, and in that process it is often challenged, compromised, or resisted. The same holds true for territoriality. State practices of demarcation, surveillance and symbolic spatial appropriation are often challenged or compromised by other attempts at shaping the lay of the land (Lunstrum 2009; Vandergeest and Peluso 1995; Watts 2004). That process of continuously reproducing and enacting political geographies is commonly referred to as “territorialisation”, though there is some terminological overlap with territoriality. Political ecologists have explored territorialisation by juxtaposing state rule with physical ecological features, and the life practices of human populations (Le Billon 2001; Peluso and Vandergeest 2011; Peluso and Watts 2001; Vandergeest and Peluso 1995; 2006a; 2006b; Watts 2003; 2004).

Nancy Peluso and Peter Vandergeest take a historical perspective on the way southeast Asian states have territorialised their frontiers, the peripheral areas that were gradually subjected to a project of supposed civilisation, administration and securitisation. They describe the ways in which governments turned the (wild) “jungle” into (administered) “forest” by: depopulating the forest by concentrating forest dwelling populations in civilised (and controllable) hamlets; the deliberate in-migration of loyalist groups; expanding the infrastructure and technology of surveillance (roads, helicopters, mapping, remote sensing); and the proliferation of army camps, forest departments, and border installations. They observe some tantalising parallels between colonial efforts at controlling and

¹⁸ Unfortunately, Raffestin’s well-know book “Pour une géographie du pouvoir” (1980) has not been translated into English. I thus rely on English texts discussing his work, mainly by Stuart Elden (2010) and Juliette Fall (2007).

¹⁹ Sack, another pioneer in this area, provides a more straight-forward definition of territoriality: “the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area. This area will be called territory.” (1986: 19) However, this definition assumes a rather top-down understanding of power, which does not tally well with the more relational interpretation I have advocated in the preceding sections.

regulating peripheral jungles, post-colonial trajectories of state formation, and more recent environmental conservation efforts. All these efforts converge around the need for territorialised order. This order is often legitimised with reference to modern science and becomes manifest through monitoring systems, control over natural resources, and attempts at regulating human behaviour within clearly demarcated areas (Peluso and Vandergeest 2011; Vandergeest and Peluso 1995; 2006a; 2006b).

The ground realities of these territorial projects look slightly less orderly. Populations resist or escape surveillance and control, economic dynamics around natural resources generate their own incentives and territorial logics, the different tentacles of the state do not necessarily work towards the same end, and more particular agendas convolute the neat administrative order of demarcated spaces. In several cases, these forms of contestation have escalated into full-blown insurgencies ("jungle wars") (Peluso and Vandergeest 2011; Peluso and Watts 2001). These historical analyses bear relevance to the Sri Lankan context; more specifically they resonate with Korf's work (2005; 2006b; 2009). As elaborated in chapter 3, northeast Sri Lanka may also be understood as a frontier. The irrigation schemes that were built across these scrub areas comprised a fascinating cocktail of scientifically warranted modern development, state security interests, shifting ethnic demography, and the religious overtones of genealogical claims on these peripheral spaces.

Debates on territorialisation gained new impetus when globalisation became a central topic of scholarly inquiry in the 1990s. Globalised flows of people, capital, goods, and information permeated state borders with ever-greater ease, diluting and challenging (somewhat romantic) ideas of place-based authenticity and purity. Human life seems to become increasingly detached from territory. It has de-territorialised (Antonsich 2009; Appadurai 1996; Murphy 2002). Echoing Fukuyama's "end of history" (1989), this even caused some observers to announce the "end of geography" (O'Brien 1992). That requiem was cut short by geography's resurrection however. Globalisation transforms the local, it does not destroy it, and it is not a homogenizing force. De-territorialisation always results in re-territorialisation (Ó'Tuathail 1999). Whilst debates on territory obviously need to go beyond a worldview of sealed nation-state containers (Agnew 1994), the notions of spatial belonging, demarcation and control, and contestation over territories have clearly not lost relevance. In fact, there is a point to be made that globalisation has only reinvigorated territorial sentiments, because it fuelled

existential anxieties over who belongs where (Appadurai 1996; 2006). Appadurai argues, this often results in conflicts over “ethnoscapes” (1996: 33). It may be overstating the point to blame globalisation for the apparent onslaught of ethno-territorial conflicts in the 1990s. After all, they are not an entirely new phenomenon. But it is an important observation that people are still willing to die for territory in an era of flash capital, long-haul flights and Facebook. The supposed demise of the nation-state has not done away with separatism and our globalised society continues to witness highly localised struggles over belonging. Well-studied cases like the Israeli-Palestine conflict (Alatout 2009; Falah 2003; Yiftachel 1998, 2002) and Hindu-Muslim violence in India (Appadurai 2006; Bachetta 2000; Berenschot 2011; Brass 2003 Chatterjee 2009; Hansen 2001a; Oza 2006; Wilkinson 2004) reveal the fine-grained territorial turf battles, boundary-making and other forms of claiming space.

Armed conflicts produce and reproduce spatial orderings on the ground. Geography is not just a background factor, or a source of ideological inspiration. It is actively crafted through military offensives, displacement, hardening of societal fault lines, checkpoints, settlement politics, symbolic apportionment of space, and the manipulation of flows of goods, people or ideas (Appadurai 2006; Fluri 2010; Gregory and Pred 2006; Kobayasyi 2009; Korf 2011; Lunstrum 2009). Empirical research shows that wars do not turn whole countries into one big violent clash. Violence is spatially variegated and issues, parties and dynamics vary from place to place as well (Kalyvas 2006; O’Loughlin et al. 2010; Raleigh et al. 2010). To return to the case of India, Hindu-Muslim violence manifests itself in localised struggles over the allegiance of neighbourhoods and fights over specific sites. Particular mosques get torn down; particular Hindu temples are desecrated with slaughtered cows. The larger narrative of Indian identity politics and the mobilisation of Hindu-nationalism (e.g. the concept of “Hindutva”) thus gets entangled with much more specific geographies evolving around purity concepts of caste or religion (Appadurai 2006; Bachetta 2000; Chatterjee 2009; Oza 2006). In similar vein, the violent struggle in Israel and Palestine has a macro-level narrative, but also comprises a much more localised set of conditions produced by the exact position of the Wall, demographic patterns, Jewish settlements and associated infrastructure, access to water and land, specific religious sites, and people’s every ways of dealing with (or resisting, or circumventing) those circumstances (Alatout 2009; Falah 2003; Fleishman and Salomon 2008; Smith 2011; Yiftachel 1998).

These findings corroborate our earlier observation that wars – rather than state collapse – involve competing and overlapping projects of rule and claims to authority, which continuously compromise each other. Korf et al. (2010a) draw on the aforementioned catchphrase of “warscapes” to explore the cases of Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka. They illustrate how different players claim some form of legitimate authority and/or exercise physical coercion in a given territory, and how this leaves people with the challenging task of navigating a highly variegated spatial pattern of rulers that compete, connive and converge with each other. Very similar observations emerge from Donald Moore’s (2005) ethnography of Zimbabwe. His book “Suffering for territory” describes the “entangled landscapes” of a region grappling with divergent situated practices and claims to authority. Rather than the local resisting the external, or the state subjecting its people, this results in a conflation of “rainmaking and chiefly rule; colonial ranch and postcolonial resettlement schemes, site-specific land claims and discourses of national liberation; ancestral inheritance and racialized possession” (2005: 4). Moore’s ethnography takes a longer-term historical perspective and this raises interesting questions about change and continuity. If war can be understood as a warscape, what does a post-warscape look like? The interaction between multiple forms of territorialised rule expectably changes, but this does not herald an end to contested boundaries, contradictory spatial regimes and competing projects of territorialisation.

More fundamentally, the question rises how the political geography of a region marked by protracted warfare reconfigures itself when that war ends. The four pillars of our political geography perspective were all conceptualised in non-deterministic ways. Identity, politics, the state and space are not simply there. Rather they are articulated, produced and reproduced by human minds and human practice. Somewhat paradoxically, they are both constituted by and constitutive of everyday life. How then can these concepts help us understand change? After all, war endings are dramatic historical turning points, but if political geography and its four pillars are not simply derived from or driven by a clear-cut order or pre-existing qualities of human society, what makes for this change? And how do we account for the characteristics that do not change? How do we make sense of the transition that takes place when “peace” is declared, be it through a peace agreement or a military victory? It is to these questions that the rest of this chapter is dedicated.

2.6 The conundrum of peace and the teleological trap

The previous four sections have shed light on war from four different angles. In doing so they de-emphasised an element that is normally put at central stage: the condition of war involves organised armed violence between two or more parties. In quantitative research this rudimentary definition is normally complemented with parameters about the number of fatalities (most databases use 1000 per year, but this is of course somewhat arbitrary), the nature of the parties (at least one of these typically represents the state) and some exclusionary principles (e.g. fatalities on both sides so as to exclude dictatorial regimes oppressing a population).²⁰ As explained in the introduction, I have deliberately avoided placing too much emphasis on these military dimensions, to avoid a “conflict bias”: the suggestion that war is a concept in and of itself, which overrides other characteristics of the societies. I am following suit here with Lubkemann’s argument to unsettle “the hegemony of violence” (2008: 12-15). The condition of armed conflict is not simply a derivative of the military confrontation we encounter in the condensed plots of newspaper headlines and historical summaries. Instead, the wider structures and dynamics of a conflict blend with localised issues, interpretations and power structures.

What does that imply for our understanding of war endings? The demise of large-scale organised armed violence makes for an important change. In the Sri Lankan case, the military defeat of the LTTE and the liquidation of the movement’s entire leadership in May 2009 marked the end of nearly three decades of war. In many other cases, war’s end may not be so clear-cut (a point to which we turn below), but it is hard to imagine a (sudden or gradual) cessation of military onslaught would go unnoticed in any context. Yet, the concurrent changes are not over-determined by the end of organised armed violence. Phrased differently, the end of war does not equal “peace”, though there may be strong political reasons to present it as such. That label, however, conjures up a whole set of issues.

There is a sizable body of work on peacebuilding and war-to-peace transitions. Much of this literature puts imperative questions in the foreground. Implicitly or explicitly, it is driven by the question whether and how peace can be achieved. These questions have long history indeed²¹, but the first attempt at delineating

²⁰ For discussion on definitions of armed conflict and the challenges of the use of divergent in quantitative studies, see Dixon (2009).

²¹ And so do the basic answers, which can be placed on the spectrum between idealism and realism. Phrased very simply, the idealist antecedents run roughly from the Platonic ideal form of peace advocated by Socrates and Kant’s ideas on democratic peace, to Wilsonian self-determination, and the creation of the UN (and universal human

peace as a separate field of study arguably dates back to the conflict resolution literature of the 1950s. Oft-cited names include Kenneth Boulding (and the Quaker movement), Johan Galtung (famous for terms like the conflict triangle, positive peace and structural violence), John Burton (and his work on conflict management), the Harvard School (of negotiation and mediation), and John Paul Lederach (and the Mennonites).²² Each of these efforts explored ways of peacefully addressing conflicts and their causes, often from an explicitly normative standpoint, and they continue to resound in much of the applied literature on peace.

A second body of work focuses on the deployment of peacekeepers and associated interventions. Building on much older ideas around peace as governance (Richmond 2005), this literature foregrounds the revival of United Nations (UN) peace missions after the Cold War. It distinguishes different kinds and generations of interventions, such as peace monitoring, peacekeeping, peace building, peace enforcement.²³ The expansion of UN operations in the 1990s – more missions, wider mandates, larger capacities – along with the rise of regional actors (like the European Union [EU] and the African Union [AU]) and the changing role of NATO²⁴ has subsequently spawned a whole industry of peace interventions and associated research agendas.²⁵ This has resulted in a sizable library of publications aimed at describing, evaluating and improving peace efforts. In the more dramatic cases, the focus lies well beyond the mere facilitation of a peace agreement: international intervention aspires to take an “integrated” or 3-D (Defence, Diplomacy and Development) approach. This in fact amounts to the ambition of “state-building” (see the discussion under 2.4) and ranges from the establishing military dominance to re-shaping the public administration, the provision of relief, social engineering under the banner of reconciliation, the rehabilitation of health and education, and so on. Much of the applied literature has adopted – if somewhat critically – the policy lingo and the

rights), all of which underline the importance of legitimacy and just peace. The realist view is more cynical and finds its antecedents in Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, the “balance of power” coined at the 1815 Vienna Congress, and more contemporary proponents of a victor’s peace, like Luttwak’s “give war a chance” (1999). Most authors of course acknowledge that both power and legitimacy matter and seek a middle ground on this simplified spectrum of realism and idealism. For a much more thorough and nuanced overview, see Richmond (2005), chapter 1 in particular.

²² For more detail, see Ramsbotham et al. (2005), mainly chapter 2, as well as Demmers (2012).

²³ The UN’s own reports are often used as a milestones here, most saliently: “An Agenda for Peace” (1992), the “Human Development Report” of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which introduced the term Human Security (1994), the “Supplement to the Agenda for Peace” (1995), the Report on Conflict Prevention (1998), the Brahimi report on comprehensive peace missions with “credible force” (2000), the “Millennium Development Goals” (2000), the “Responsibility to Protect” (2001), “A More Secure World” (2004), and “In Larger Freedom” (2005).

²⁴ NATO stands for North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

²⁵ This is not the place to discuss these works at length, but some relevant publications contemporary interventions by the AU, EU and NATO include: Bono (2004), Cilliers (2008), Daniel and Caraher (2006), Dobbins (2007), Duke (2008), European Commission (2006), Feldman (2008), Flechtner (2006), Haine et al. (2008), Houben (2005), Kaldor et al. (2007), Mobekk (2009), Morsut (2009), Nowak (2006), Olsen (2009), Ulriksen (2004), and Vankovska (2007).

underlying intervention logics. Examples include “Security Sector Reform” (Ball 2005; Bryden and Hänggi 2004; Cooper and Pugh 2002; Smith 2001), “transitional justice” (Hovil and Okello 2011), post-war elections (Brancati and Snyder 2011; De Zeeuw and Kumar 2006; Gurr et al. 2000; Gurr et al. 2005; Snyder 2000), governance and “capacity development” (Brinkerhoff 2010; Doig and Tisne 2009), and more generally the challenges of “post-conflict development” (Junne and Verkoren 2005; Krause and Juttersonke 2005). Unsurprisingly, the countries in which large-scale interventions are taking (or have recently taken) place, such as Afghanistan and Iraq, the Balkans, East Timor, Sudan, Liberia or the Democratic Republic Congo, are well represented in this literature.²⁶

More recently, Geographers have followed suit with these attempts at studying peace. Their discipline has a rather tainted history of rationalising, and at times legitimising war, empire, and expansionist notions like “Lebensraum” (living space). In recent years, several geographers have attempted to redress that balance with concerted efforts of exploring the geography of war *and* peace (Flint 2005; Kobayasyi 2009). This comprised not only empirical analyses and spatial conceptualisations of peace, but also normative calls to for a geographical commitment to peace, e.g. by propagating a “pacific geopolitics” (Megan 2011). Critical responses to these first efforts have pointed out that peace often receives little conceptual treatment in these publications. In fact, peace sometimes seems to be a sympathetic heading for a set of writings that really involve a lot more war than peace (Koopman 2011; Ross 2011; Williams and McConnell 2010). The edited volume by Kirsch and Flint (2011) – adequately titled “Reconstructing conflict” – complements these debates with a more rigorous conceptual discussion, a historical perspective, and a rich diversity of cases. Their central contention is the “false dichotomy” between war and peace. Taking “critical geopolitics” as a point of departure, they argue that war and post-war geographies are embodiments of hegemonic power relations: producing the difference between them is itself a highly political, and often violent, project. Partly in line with my elaborations below, they emphasise the continuities between war-time and post-war power politics, violence, and the perpetual reshaping of places and space. Rather than separating out spaces and times of war and of peace, the book ventures to unravel how they constitute and

²⁶ This is in fact a rather voluminous literature. In addition to the scholarly examples in the text, there is large number of reports by think tanks like the International Crisis Group, the International Peace Academy, the Overseas Development Institute, the Bonn International Center for Conversion, the Christian Michelsen Institute, Clingendael and many others.

compromise each other, e.g. by studying the convoluted geography of tsunamis and the end of war in Aceh (Waizenegger and Hyndman 2011), the diverse space of sovereignty and contestation in "Myanmar/Burma" (Grundy-Warr and Dean 2011), and the peculiar interaction, between the fault line, militarised spaces and spaces of leisure and tourism on Cyprus (Higate and Henry 2011).

There is thus a fairly voluminous literature – both prescriptive and critical – on peace and peace interventions, this brief bibliographical panorama shows. There are obviously good reasons for the policy-focused nature of much of this literature and (as elaborated in chapter 4) I have some affinity with such an approach. More in line with the developments in critical geopolitics, this dissertation aims to shed some of the normative trappings of the peace literature and take issue with hegemonic forces embodied in what gets to be declared as peace. In fact, I move beyond Kirsch and Flint's volume discussed above (2011), by venturing – somewhat counter-intuitively – to bracket the term "peace", because it is of limited analytical use to understand processes that actually unfold at the end of a war. More generally, research on peace and war-to-peace transitions is prone to what I have coined the "teleological trap" (see article 4). By putting peace at central stage, there is a risk of reducing a society to its supposed direction. This impedes a balanced inquiry into such a transition, for four reasons.

Firstly, it is often not so clear that peace will be the actual outcome. As was pointed out above, the risk of re-escalating hostilities is large in countries emerging from war. Often, what is presented as a war-to-peace transition later turns out to be a war-to-war cycle (Dixon 2009; Doyle and Sambanis 2000; Sarkees 2000). A directional understanding of a society does not make much sense if that direction can only be determined in hindsight.

Secondly, the term peace defies clear definition, particularly when we try to define it as the supposed end state of a war-to-peace transition (Keen 2000; Lubkemann 2008; Richmond 2005). Defining peace in opposition to war is too limited. Galtung's term "negative peace", the absence of large-scale violence, has an eloquent simplicity, but it obviously adds little analytical value to the term war. It is thus tempting to adopt a more expansive definition such as Galtung's "positive peace" (a just and equitable society), or a term like "human security" (UNDP 1994). However, if peace is defined as a situation where all forms of structural violence are addressed and human security (with all its economic,

health, political, environmental and other dimensions) prevails, it becomes utopian and loses its empirical traction. Tampering with the parameters will not solve the problem in my view, because peace – unlike war – is not a *condition*, a set of characteristics that can be delineated and observed (despite all the nuances and complexities spelled out in the first half of this chapter). Rather, peace is a discursive term, and is best thought of as an *aspiration*. But because there are typically contradictory views on what that aspiration entails, post-war contexts are often riven with contention and even violence, which in turn is dissonant with the harmonious overtones of the word peace. This does not mean that we should discard the term peace altogether, but it does mean its analytical use is confined to understanding discourses. It directs us to the way people define peace, how they use the term and what actions they legitimise with it, and how conceptions of peace have changed throughout history or differ between contexts. This helps us to unmask which agendas are propagated under the banner of peace, which beliefs are reified, and which power relations are served. In other words, peace – understood as an aspiration – tells us a lot about the protagonists using the term, but it cannot be defined as a condition, as a tangible situation that actually emerges. For that reason I prefer to avoid the term war-to-peace transition: it conflates a condition (war) with an aspiration (peace), it wrongly suggests that this aspiration can be realised, and it is of little use in grappling with the fact that there are almost invariably contradictory versions of that aspiration.

The third aspect of the teleological trap is the risk of the aforementioned “conflict bias”. Defining a particular context as a post-war area may wrongly lead us to explain that context *in toto* as a result of the conflict. While it is reasonable to assume that wars have wide and far-reaching effects on society, it would be a mistake to reduce post-war societies to a legacy of armed conflict. Many prevalent processes and changes are the result of other factors – drought, globalisation, urbanisation, and so on – which may get entangled in the conflict (or aspirations of peace), but are not merely derivatives of it. Moreover, a teleological understanding of post-war contexts excites normative categorisations. It is tempting to label developments as pro- or con- peace. Policy-makers, practitioners and political activists need to do so (which brings us to the point about interventionism below) and for specific aspects this makes sense: e.g. mass massacres do not aid reconciliation. But caution is warranted against squeezing all aspects of a transition into such normative schemata. The end of war involves a tantalising flurry of contingent events, parallel processes

and contradictory developments. Trying to capture these in a flow chart mutilates our understanding of such a context.

A fourth, associated problem concerns the pre-occupation with intervention that characterises much of the peace literature. This is most obviously the case with policy-oriented, consultancy-based research. Parts of this work are unable, or unwilling to ask fundamental questions about intervention. At the risk of caricaturing the setting I used to be part of,²⁷ this may – in the worst case – amount to a checklist of superficial, non-contextualised diagnoses, combined with platitudes about more coordination, ownership, and catchy (but rather meaningless) slogans like “there is no development without security”. Given the massive constraints – time pressure, research politics, methodological difficulties – it is unsurprising that these analyses often fail to put external intervention in perspective and tend to reduce local dynamics and issues to a second tier of obstacles, complications, and factors that need to be addressed. Much of the scholarly literature is of course more critical, if not altogether damning. But even so, the policy critical literature puts intervention at central stage. Pouligny’s (2006) critique on UN operation’s “Peace operations seen from below” for example,²⁸ discusses three categories of “local people”: entrepreneurs, civil society and UN employees. Her book is effective in problematising these categories and the relations these people have with the UN mission in their country, but in doing so, she still makes intervention the organising principle of her analysis. While this sheds some light on the transitions going on in these contexts, it of course provides a very particular perspective. The work associated with the liberal peace debate faces a similar obstacle (Duffield 2001, 2007; Mac Ginty 2008; Paris 2004; Richmond 2005). It is useful in debunking intervention logics, but unbalanced in making sense of the developments that actually take place in a country undergoing transition, because it emphasises the perspectives of UN commanders, World Bank directors and NGO²⁹ entrepreneurs. This is not a criticism on these publications per se – they do a good job studying interventions – but when our objective is to understand the transition in countries emerging from a war, this literature provides a somewhat tangential view. It makes more sense to first study the actual developments taking place in such a country, without pasting policy-labels or presuming that UN missions, embassies, NGOs – or even the central government – play a central role.

²⁷ For my contribution to this body of work (and the associated issues around positionality), see chapter 4.

²⁸ Another strand of criticism in relation to contemporary peace efforts underlines the lack of adaptation to local realities. Well-known authors include: Chandler (2006), Cramer (2006), De Waal (2009), and Paris and Sisk (2009).

²⁹ NGO stands for non-governmental organisation.

These four reasons – the possible relapse into war, the trouble of defining peace, the risk of a conflict bias, and skewed angle of intervention-centred analysis – beg for a more open-ended, less scripted understanding of war endings. In an attempt to avoid the conundrums of the teleological trap, I have introduced a slightly less loaded term: post-war transition. This connotes a time of fundamental and intense changes in society (“transition”), which happen after large-scale organised violence has ended (“post-war”), but without pre-supposing the direction, the drivers or the outcome. It places the occurring changes and continuities in light of the preceding war, which influenced or precipitated them, but steers clear of subjecting them to an over-determining path dependency. Critics will not have much difficulty pinpointing the flaws in this terminology. Firstly, “post-war” still suggests that there is a clear breakpoint at war’s end. In Sri Lanka, this was the case, but in many other contexts the end of war is less easy to pinpoint. Secondly, my use of the word “transition” could still be taken to imply a direction. Thus, the word post-war transition in itself does not solve all of the above problems. I am using it as shorthand here to direct my analysis to less teleological perspective in the next sections.

The body of work that we may rubric as “the anthropology of war” forms a useful point of departure here. Several ethnographic case studies of war-affected contexts have emerged over the past two decades. Many of these authors did not set out to study war itself, but rather engaged with a topic that got drawn into war or emerged from it.³⁰ Englund’s (2002) study for example narrates the story of a set of villages in the Mozambique-Malawi borderland before and after the Rome General Peace Accords in 1992. Vigh’s (2006) ethnography of youth in Guinea Bissau stumbles into the post-war context (be it briefly) and provides an insightful contextualised account of the lives of erstwhile militiamen. There are interesting non-ethnographic case studies as well, often focused on a specific theme within post-war transition.³¹ Goodhand’s work on the drug economy in Afghanistan (2008) and Tania Hohe’s critical review of East Timor’s post-war elections (2002) are two examples. There are many more examples, but given that they all speak to different cases, belong to different academic disciplines, and focus on a different aspect of post-war transition, there is little cross-

³⁰ Paul Richards pioneering work on Sierra Leone (1996; 2004; 2005), along with Carolyn Nordstrom’s more wide-ranging contribution (Nordstrom 1997, 2004) has recently been complemented by a whole set of interesting ethnographies. Often, these studies focus on a particular theme within the context of armed struggle, for example trans-border trade and displacement – in Malawi/Mozambique (Englund 2002), Mozambique/South Africa (Lubkemann 2008), or DRC/Uganda (Raeymaekers 2009) – youth culture and employment – in Palestine (Kelly 2008), Sierra Leone (Richards 1996), or Guinea Bissau (Vigh 2006) – or religiosity in Liberia (Ellis 1999).

³¹ For the relevant publications on Sri Lanka, see the end of chapter 3.

referencing. There is no consolidated body of work that attempts to study post-war transitions on the basis of detailed empirical and non-teleological analysis.

I will use the remainder of this chapter to elaborate the analytical approach underlying the shorthand of post-war transition. I will do so with some notes on how conceptualising change (section 2.7) and will then use these reflections to return to the four pillars of my political geography approach (2.8).

2.7 Change, continuity and re-articulation

How do we conceptualise the state of flux that characterised eastern Sri Lanka in recent years without falling prey to the teleological trap discussed in the previous section? The challenge of accounting for change opens up a whole set of well-established conceptual issues in social science, including those to do with: structure and agency; the workings of power; and issues to do with the level of analysis. In brief, this dissertation has adopted a relational perspective on these fundamental questions, though this remained largely implicit in my discussions on identity, politics, the state and space. The present section extracts some common conceptual foundations of the political geography approach introduced in the first half of this chapter. I will make brief reference to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, before moving on to Stuart Hall's term articulation. This will not only reinforce the common conceptual base for the above-discussed concepts, but it also helps us grapple with change, and thus with post-war transition.

Each of the four political geography pillars comprised elements of structure and agency. Identities, boundaries, antagonism, projects of rule, and territoriality – to name some of the most salient terms – have structural features which can be remarkable resilient, but they are also enactments that emerge from people's practices and strategies. As will become clear in Part II, the four core articles of this dissertation often allude to the way individual people "manoeuvre" between pressures, "juggle" their roles, and "jockey" between divergent loyalties and force fields. This clearly involves agency and it helps us understand the nuances, complexities and paradoxes of wartime and post-war life. On the other hand, there are clearly structural constraints to agency, construction and contingency. For example, Sri Lanka's conflict is embedded in the history of the post-colonial state; there are remarkable continuities though political leaders have been replaced. The people living in the war zone of eastern Sri Lanka were largely disconnected from the rest of the world, they lived under close surveillance by

the armed forces, and many were at risk of forced conscription into the LTTE. Their coping strategies could limit the damage, but the threats remained. Ethnic identities may be constructed notions, but what help was that to the tens of thousands of Tamils who were trapped on the battle field and perished in the last months of the war? They were mangled between two armies and there was little they could change about their supposedly constructed Tamil identity to avert their plight.

Pierre Bourdieu's emphasis on relations is a useful starting point for averting the pillar-to-the-post discussion that structure-agency debates may degenerate into. He introduced the term "field", a bundle of relations, to underline that agents never act in a completely unscripted or independent way. Much like a magnetic field, people continuously enter relational configurations, which apply forces on them. Individuals have a certain "habitus", they are directed by mental schemata, which stem from the historical relations deposited in them (Bourdieu 1990 [1980]: 66-68; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 16).³² These views tally well with the relational understanding of identity elaborated in section 2.2. Ethnic and political identities are constructed, but not out of the blue. And they are relational in the sense of linking some people together, while excluding others.

A relational understanding of power reminds us that it is never altogether absent, and that it involves not only the supposed "power-holders", but also the people subjected to it. At first sight, armed conflicts may seem an excellent context for studying coercion and the ruthless strategies of men holding power. If social contexts are like magnetic fields, war obviously involves some pretty strong magnets. But war is not simply a function of military might and it does not render social and political relations irrelevant. Checkpoints, surveillance, oppression and forced conscription are only a part of the story, and even these seemingly coercive strategies do not altogether escape issues of legitimacy, authority, and acceptance. After all, armed parties – however violent – often work hard to win people's "hearts and minds", to get concurrence and support, for example through symbolic measures (flags, ceremonies and propaganda).³³ Moreover, as discussed in section 2.4 and 2.5, wars often involve a warscape with several competing projects of rule, each of which gets compromised by unruly practices and counter-forces.

³² We find similar ideas with Norbert Elias (for discussion see Loyal and Quilley 2004), who uses the term figuration. Klaus Schlichte (2009) has recently adopted this relational perspective to conceptualise armed movements.

³³ Hannah Arendt in fact goes as far as saying power and violence are opposites. Violence is only needed when power fails and power is undercut through the exercise of violence. "Violence appears where power is endangered, but if violence is allowed to have its way, it results in the disappearance of power." (Arendt 2009[1969]: 79) (my translation from Dutch).

Different fields thus overlap, compound, reinforce or contradict each other. And they do so at different levels. Most of the concepts discussed under the headings of identity, politics and the state are layered. They assume different meaning when people construct them in relation to the personal sphere, a locality or region, an ethnic group, the nation or trans-national ties. These imagined levels are neither fixed nor hierarchical, but activating or de-activating them does make a difference: it turns majorities into minorities and vice versa; it reverses power relations and shatters unities; it crushes bastions of belonging and redefines axes of confrontation or affinity; it lends grandeur to what is otherwise insignificant. These observations are clearly very relevant to the analysis of armed conflict. It makes a difference at what level of aggregation we study war. Generic analyses of "the war in Sri Lanka" implicitly single out that war as a phenomenon with identifiable protagonists and causes. One can add nuance and complexity, but a narrative of "the war in Sri Lanka" is likely to treat local arenas as derivatives or exceptions of an imaginary overall plot. That suggestion often does not stand up to closer scrutiny. More localised study of the way specific places or groups of people were engulfed in conflict fare better in this respect, but this approach has its own weakness: it is prone to Mary Douglas' "bongo bongo-ism" (the difficulty of generalisation)³⁴, it provides little traction for an understanding of the wider characteristics of a war, and it is vulnerable to reifying conflict as the context in which the research takes place and may thus displace the conflict's causal background from the research area.

A relational perspective on this challenge requires us to look at the interaction between localised life worlds on one hand with more encompassing categories like the history of state formation, (ethno-)nationalist politics, and conceptions of homeland, sovereignty and belonging on the other. Recent research efforts have made interesting forays along these lines, for example in political science (e.g. Kalyvas 2003; 2006) and anthropology (e.g. Lubkemann 2008). Kalyvas' (2003; 2006) quantitative analysis of the Greek civil war – corroborated with statistics from other case studies – argues for disaggregating our understanding of violence in civil wars. Patterns of violence typically differ between the localities of one war, in a way that generic conflict analysis cannot explain. Kalyvas' explanation lies in the way "master cleavages" interact with "local cleavages". Violence is thus not just a derivative of macro-level polarisation, but gets entangled with more

³⁴ The term refers to Mary Douglas (1970: 15-16) well-known quote that this is the "trap for all anthropological discussion. Hitherto when a generalisation is tentatively advanced, it is rejected out of court by any fieldworkers, who can say: 'Thus is all very well, but it doesn't apply to the Bongo-Bongo.'"

localised dynamics and more particular agendas. Coming from a completely different angle – an ethnography of people displaced by the war in Mozambique – Stephen Lubkemann makes a similar point³⁵: there “was no singular Mozambican war.” (2008: 29) He demonstrates how wartime violence in his field site (Machaze) “was profoundly influenced by local social struggles, with their own historical specificity and cast in culturally specific terms that had little to do with the contest for state power. To the extent that such local struggles infiltrated and affected its deployment, war-time violence became implicated in, and reshaped by, highly localised terms. Such infusions of violence into everyday social interaction shaped the very perception of crisis and reconfigured social opportunity structures in highly localized ways.” (2008: 29)

The above notes on a relational perspective (on agency and structure, conceptions of power, levels of analysis) may seem like a detour, but they put us in a better position to tackle the central theme of this paragraph: change. The reflections above avert rigid forms of order. The interplay between structural conditions and an agent’s space for manoeuvre, the interaction and compromise between different fields of power, and the (dis-)connection and (de-)activation of different levels of aggregation all project a sense of dynamism. They open up a space of possibility and contingency. They underline that human society – despite its often resilient characteristics – is continuously reproduced, re-enacted and re-negotiated. And that enables us to engage with change and transition. Looking at transition from this perspective helps shedding the teleological trappings that the previous section took issue with. Rather than a coherent directional shift from one condition to another, this conceptualisation of transition is more amorphous. It comprises the *re-articulation* of a society. Rather than emerging from one structural factor, a particular field of power, or one level or site, change is driven by the above-mentioned processes of reproduction and re-enactment. I will elaborate on this in section 2.8.

The term articulation is derived from the work of Stuart Hall and his colleagues (Hall 1996b; Morley et al. 1996). Their school of cultural studies has Marxist antecedents – the intellectual pedigree carries the traces of Marx, Gramsci and Althusser – but loosens the structuralist trappings of this tradition. Hall uses the term articulation to signify that practices are not just a derivative of power and

³⁵ Kalyvas and Lubkemann represent fundamentally different disciplines and in the end their conclusions do not tally well. The former analyses the micro-macro interaction to identify generally applicable patterns in civil wars; the latter studies them to shed light on unique localised circumstances. However, both converge around the need to move beyond single-level analysis and that realisation is likely to have an impact on future research agendas as well.

structures, but interact with them, thus opening up space for agency and contingency. In line with the thoughts above, central importance is thus attached to relational patterns, which are reflective of human behaviour, but guide that behaviour as well.³⁶ Articulation itself has the double meaning of uttering (formulating) and connecting (Hall uses the metaphor of an articulated truck, consisting of a cab and a trailer). This process of articulation, of connecting and disconnecting, is continuous. Relations are thus subject to change and are never final.

Deborah Winslow and Micheal Woost (2004), whose book was a welcome conceptual contribution to the scholarly literature on Sri Lanka, argue that Hall's work is useful in conceptualising war. After all, war is far from static. It changes as it unfolds and in doing so, it often transforms its own causes. If a certain kind of antagonism or political dynamic drove the escalation of conflict, those antagonisms and politics will not remain unaffected when the war ravages the country.³⁷ In their own words: "the war in Sri Lanka today is not a detour; it has become the path taken, a fully embedded part of the social formation, consequence as well as cause. Now the war is not just what is happening *in* Sri Lanka; it has become an important part of what Sri Lanka *is*, a social formation of war that is reproduced in daily life." (Winslow and Woost 2004: 12, emphasis in original)

Though they could not know at the time, there is a clear analogy to Sri Lanka today. The post-war condition is also not just situated *in* Sri Lanka, it is part of what Sri Lanka *is*. It is neither a return to what was before, nor a mere legacy of the war. It is a re-articulation of the relations that make up society, a recalibration of identities, of politics, of the state and of space. Post-war transition is thus not just a top-down consequence of government policy, or a systemic shift driven by military victory. These factors are of course important, but the actual changes that take place on the ground, I posit, comprise a more fundamental re-articulation of the way people relate to themselves, to each other, and to projects of rule.

³⁶ In that respect this school of thought and the term articulation bears semblance with Bourdieu (field) and Elias (figuration).

³⁷ Somewhat schematically, conflict researchers have distinguished between "root causes" and "reproductive causes" of conflict. More elaborate categorisation of conflict causes may also distinguish mobilising factors, aggravating (or accelerating) factors, prolonging (or sustaining) factors, and triggers. While such categorisations are useful, they provide a schematic solution. As argued by Woodward (2007), it is questionable whether root causes really exist, whether they can be distinguished from reproductive causes, and whether they still matter once a war has escalated.

2.8 Post-war transition as the re-articulation of political geography

We are coming full circle in the closing paragraph of this chapter. Keeping in mind the above thoughts of conceptualising post-war transition in a non-teleological way (sections 2.6 and 2.7), we will return to the four pillars of a political geography perspective (sections 2.2 - 2.5). Identity, politics, the state and space provided us with different angles on the political geography of war. These perspectives do not lose their relevance when a war ends. On the contrary: I posit that we can understand the end of a war as the re-articulation of political geography in all its four dimensions. This chapter will close with a brief elaboration on what such a re-articulation of political geography may entail.

Reshuffling identity struggles

Section 2.2 discussed the mutual relations between armed conflict and group identities, such as ethnicity and nationalism: the mobilisation of identity is a common ingredient of war's causative cocktail; political violence in turn re-articulates identities. War tends to harden certain fault lines and give prominence to certain kinds of identity, while other boundaries and identities move to the background. One kind of rivalry may come forward as the "master cleavage" (Kalyvas' aforementioned term), but that does not mean that other identities and lines of content cease to exist. This becomes particularly relevant in a post-war context. Societies emerging from a protracted armed conflict are typically implicated by the legacy of rifts and enmity. Years of boundary-making and othering, military surveillance, and the glorification of genealogical myths leave marks that may last generations. Yet, on the other hand, many of these reproductive cycles and practices of dramatising identity and guarding boundaries are affected when a military victory or a peace agreement puts an end to large-scale organised violence. As elaborated in article 4, circulation intensifies when checkpoints are lifted and roads are opened. And when the military landscape changes, so does the state of siege that communities experience. For example, the demise of the LTTE eased a major source of threat for Sri Lanka's Muslim community. Their existential anxieties increasingly gravitated towards the triumphant victory mood of the Sinhalese majority. And it opened up space for intra-Muslim divides – competing religious sects, town-based rivalries – to play a more salient role (see article 1 and 2). These examples illustrate that struggles over identity get reshuffled in the post-war context. Turf battles over genealogy and belonging and the forging of identity boundaries do not simply mould with

war-time trenches. Neither do they start on a clean slate or revert to pre-war conditions. Longer-histories of identity construction and subsequent legacies of the war play out in different ways, with differences of emphasis, adjusted forms of loyalty and new forms of rupture.

Reconfiguring the political

These observations resonate with the conceptualisation of the political in section 2.3. Rather than emphasizing public policy – ideally the privileged sphere of rational deliberation and consensus-seeking – the section referred to the work of Jonathan Spencer, Chantal Mouffe, and Carl Schmitt to suggest that politics is fundamentally antagonistic. Rather than a disruption or manifestation of politics, these authors argue that antagonism between “us” and “them” – “friends” and “foes” – is constitutive of politics itself. If such dynamics are indeed fundamental and inevitable, “the political” will logically continue to play a central role in a post-war society. For one thing, war endings often create winners and losers. This reminds us of Schmitt’s cynical suggestion – echoed by Mouffe – that every consensus in fact comprises a new form of exclusion. What is presented as consensus in their view really constitutes the declaration of a new us, and therefore it is an expression of just another us-them divide. Peace lends itself to an equally cynical reading and it does not take much fantasy to project these views on the victory speech of the Sri Lankan president in 2009. Mahinda Rajapakse declared there were no longer any ethnic minorities in the country, only those who love Sri Lanka and those who don’t (for critical discussion, see Jazeel and Ruwanpura 2009; Wickramasinghe 2009). Rather than a harmonious compromise, Sri Lanka’s victor’s peace thus projected a divide between supposed patriots and traitors.

“The post-war political”, as we may call it, thus propels triumph and humiliation, celebration and anxiety, and – perhaps more than anything else – continued antagonism. Yet, we have taken Mouffe’s rigid scheme of us and them with a grain of salt in section 2.3 by underlining that there is more than one form of antagonism – spurred by different ways of defining us and them – and that opens up some scope for change and, perhaps, a glimmer of hope. There is a risk of clinging on to an eerie kind of conflict nostalgia, that foes will always be foes (and friends perhaps will always remain friends). If different ways of defining “us” connect us with people who would otherwise just be “them”, perhaps we are not condemned to group enmity after all. Group identities are not static, antagonism

is subject to change, and the emphasis between different forms of antagonism may shift. Notwithstanding my criticism on overly teleological interpretations, post-war transition *is* a time of change and reconfiguration. If violence is the heightened form of politics, to reiterate Jonathan Spencer's phrase, decreasing levels of violence may open up space for different kinds of political dynamics. Ceremonial declarations that the war is over, the easing of surveillance and the cessation of gunfire and shelling expectably do make a political difference. We thus need to look how the political gets reconfigured: how symbols and practices remake or soften group boundaries; what collective identities get reified or glorified and which ones may wither; and what new us-them divides are emerging, generating new forms of antagonism within or across previous formations.

Recalibrating public authority

Section 2.4 underlined the flaws of equating war with state collapse, and the corresponding suggestion that it can be overcome through "state-building". I discussed a sequence of political sociologists and anthropologists to underline three points. First, state practices are often at loggerheads with the discourse of a coherent and rational actor that hangs above the fray of society. Second, this discourse is nonetheless important provides state institutions with an aura of naturalness, legitimacy, perseverance and indispensability. It is through these discourses and associated practices that the state gets enacted. Third, this "state-trick" is not easily monopolised: non-governmental actors like insurgencies may adapt very similar postures. War-torn areas are thus characterised by more convoluted claims to sovereign rule, which overlap, contradict or compromise each other.

These unruly practices may take an extreme form in the context of war, but the basic principle is not altogether abnormal. The myth of a coherent and rational state does not materialise as an actual practice in any context, and neither does it in post-war context. There are important differences between a wartime- and post-war state functioning, but they have little to do with a complete breakdown of public administration during the war or a reconstitution of uniform rule after the war ends. Contestation and bargaining continue throughout. Public authority and the enactment of the state are recalibrated. The playing field of public authority changes when a rebel movement gets defeated, or agrees to convert itself into a democratic party within the sovereign state it used to fight (to name

two common scenarios). This will change the actual dynamics of rule, the cast of brokers, and their relative bargaining positions. But this does not erase all war-time relations of power, lines of affinity and forms of subjectivation. And it does not make all actors – politicians, ex-militants, civil servants, community authorities – converge in one homogeneous form of sovereign rule. In fact, post-war transition may open up new spaces of transgression, corruption, political interference, and violent coercion. Some of these feature saliently in article 3, which reviews the way post-war transition affected Sri Lanka's civil servants.

Re-territorialisation

Finally, we may conceive of post-war transition as a process of re-territorialisation. The end of a war, I suggest, heralds changes in the lay of the land, which are both influenced by and impact on the previous three forms of re-articulation. Section 2.5 juxtaposed a whole set of geographical terms – place, movement, territory – with questions of identity, belonging and forms of rule. It reviewed the work of political ecologists like Nancy Peluso, Peter Vandergeest, and Michael Watts on the nexus between the state formation and territorialisation, and the counter-forces to this historical trajectory. I invoked recent work in critical geopolitics in section 2.5 on the way spaces and times are produced as “war” and “peace” and mutually constitute post-war political landscapes. These analyses were particularly relevant for so-called warsapes. Armed conflicts are often underpinned by spatially grounded claims like homeland or holy land, and the onslaught of organised armed violence produces its own spatial orderings through displacement, checkpoints, settlement politics, or symbolic apportionment of space. This may result in a state of equilibrium with fairly sedimented practices, as was the case in the late 1990s in Sri Lanka.

A war ending, however, is far from an equilibrium. The re-articulations to do with identity, politics and the state (discussed above) have spatial dimensions, but post-war re-territorialisation is more fundamental. Roads may be re-opened or newly built, checkpoints and other restrictions on the circulation of goods and people may be lifted, access to telecommunication may improve, and so on. Post-war re-territorialisation thus involves a whole set of opening and closing spaces, a re-articulation of connections and disconnections. Article 4 zooms in on some of these processes. Displaced people are being resettled or relocated, militaries cordon off strategic areas (or release them), new infrastructure re-links people and places, victors post their flags and icons to claim important sites. Previously

forlorn regions get reconnected to the world, possibly easing hardships, but also increasing their exposure to new influences and people. Post-war transition involves a recalibration of the lay of the land, and that causes all kinds of predictable and unpredictable changes, opportunities and anxieties.

In sum, this chapter has argued for a non-teleological perspective by conceiving of post-war transition as re-articulation of political geography. This involves the reshuffling of identity struggles, reconfiguring the political, recalibrating public authority and re-territorialisation. While war endings often comprise a moment of dramatic change, these concepts allude to longer-term patterns in the constitution and reproduction of human society. It is therefore important to ground post-war transition in a thorough understanding of context and history. Before we turn to the specific arguments that I make about the current transition in eastern Sri Lanka (the articles in Part II), chapter 3 will thus provide us with contextual background on the region.

Chapter 3

Contextual background to eastern Sri Lanka

The contextual background provided in the articles (Part II) is limited to a bare minimum. This chapter therefore gives a more elaborate overview of the context on which this research is focused. Firstly, section 3.1 introduces us to Sri Lanka's east coast, which is a unique part of the island. Section 3.2 broadens our scope to discuss the historical background of Sri Lanka's armed conflict, its causes, and the way it transformed Sri Lankan society, and the east of the island in particular. Finally, section 3.3 provides a narrative of the turbulent decade from 2001 to 2011, both nationally and in the east.

3.1. Sri Lanka's east coast: a contested borderland

Eastern Sri Lanka is like "pittu" as its Tamil-speaking inhabitants say. This local dish with alternating layers of rice flour and scraped coconut serves as a metaphor for the geographical patchwork that the region is. The east coast harbours a sprawling diversity of natural features, cultural and religious influences, and pockets with divergent ethnic signatures. In many ways, it is a borderland, a coastline of fragmented regions – unified for reasons projected on it from the outside. The region consists of three districts – Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara – and does not have a clear centre (see Map 3A below).

Trincomalee, the capital of the Eastern Province, has a renowned natural harbour, which bestows it with some commercial and geo-strategic significance, but it remains a middle-sized town (89.000 inhabitants)³⁸ that mainly caters for the people in its direct vicinity. Batticaloa (88.000 inhabitants), the other historical hub on the east coast, has greater cultural significance, particularly for Tamils. Whenever the distinctness of the dialect, customs or history of Sri Lanka's eastern Tamils is invoked, it is referred to as Batticaloa Tamil, rather than Trinco Tamil. Ampara, the capital of the third district of the Eastern Province, is an

³⁸ Population statistics are taken from 2007 census data (special enumeration). Town populations are based on the respective Divisional Secretary (DS) divisions.

upgraded paddy town with a mere 39.000 inhabitants. It only recently gained some stature and is dwarfed by the Muslim towns on the District's coast.³⁹ Each of the three districts has a distinct ethnic configuration. Trincomalee is tri-ethnic, though the demographic ratio of Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese has varied over time. Batticaloa is strongly Tamil dominated, but has some significant Muslim towns. Ampara was carved out from Batticaloa in 1958. It is home to a sequence of sizable Muslim (and Tamil) towns along the coast, and Sinhala dominated settlements in the interior and the far south of the district – many of them more recent paddy colonies. In addition to the three largest ethnic groups, the east is

Table 3A: Population of the Eastern Province (ethnic groups and districts)

		Sinhalese	Tamil¹	Muslim²	Other	Total
Ampara District	Number	228.938	112.006	268.630	1145	610.719
	Perc.	37,49%	18,34%	43,99%	0,19%	100%
Batticaloa District	Number	2397	381.984	128.964	2512	515.857
	Perc.	0,46%	74,05%	25,00%	0,49%	100%
Trincomalee District	Number	84.766	96.142	151.692	1763	334.363
	Perc.	25,35%	28,75%	45,37%	0,53%	100%
Eastern Province	Number	316.101	590.132	549.286	5420	1.460.939
	Perc.	21,64%	40,39%	37,60%	0,37%	100%

Table 3B: National population statistics (ethnic groups)

		Sinhalese	Tamil¹	Muslim²	Other groups	Total
Sri Lanka	Number	13.977.034	3.342.867	1.696.352	76.432	19.059.418
	Perc.	73,21%	17,51%	8,88%	0,40%	100%

Sources: Census (Department of Census and Statistics 2001), Special Enumerations (Department of Census and Statistics 2007a; 2007b) and Statistical Information (Northern Provincial Council 2009).⁴⁰

Notes: 1) Tamil includes both "Sri Lankan Tamils" and "Indian Tamils".
2) Muslim denotes the so-called "Sri Lankan Moors" in this table. Malay are included under "other".

³⁹ The biggest one, the Kalmunai-Sainthamaruthu agglomeration, has 97.000 inhabitants.

⁴⁰ Population data from the northeast are controversial. There are no encompassing population figures for all of Sri Lanka. The latest comprehensive census dates from before the war (1981). A new census was done in 2001, but this excluded the Northern Province and part of the Eastern Province (Trincomalee and Batticaloa). These tables thus include figures from different years, which results in inaccuracies. The categories used in these publications differ as well. As a result I have had to aggregate Tamils (Sri Lankan Tamils and "Indian" Tamils) and disaggregate Muslims (excluding the Malay, a smaller, separate group of Muslims who migrated from Java, Malaysia and Somalia during colonial times) as is mentioned in note 1 and 2 above. This probably makes the numerical difference between Tamils and Muslims look slightly larger than it actually is.

Table 3A is based on:

- the National Census of 2001 (Ampara District);
- the Special Enumerations for Trincomalee and Batticaloa Districts (2007).

Table 3B is a composite of:

- the Special Enumerations (2007) for the districts Trincomalee and Batticaloa;
- the Statistical Information booklet of the Northern Provincial Council (2009, but using DS data from 2007) for the entire Northern Province (the districts Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar and Vavuniya);
- the National Census (2001) for all other districts.

inhabited by Burghers (descendents of colonial inter-marriage), Veddahs (the label for the island's erstwhile forest dwellers), gypsies and Cakkiliyar (both with South Indian roots), and – the smallest, but perhaps most curious tribe – expats (until recently, mostly western professionals doing short term contracts for aid agencies).

Travelling through the Eastern Province, Islamic mosques, Hindu kovils, Buddhist viharas and Christian churches follow on to each other in rapid succession. People's dress, the prevalent language, the composition of homes and streets, and the cuisine alternate equally rapidly. Along the coast itself, Tamil and Muslim settlements lie interspersed with each other. Sometimes the boundary lies straight through the middle of a town (as is the case in Akkaraipattu, article 1). With the gradual expansion of towns and villages, ribbon development along the coastal road has merged many of the erstwhile separate settlements. The coastal stretch from south to north from Thirukkivil (via Akkaraipattu, Kalmunai, Kattankudy, Batticaloa and Eravur) to Valaichennai has become an almost uninterrupted built-up corridor of paddy towns, fishermen's communities, and more urbanised places with a dense grid of shops, houses, and markets. There is often a remarkable flurry of activity in these towns. Chock-a-block restaurants, tailors, sari shops, telecom stores, vegetable markets and petrol sheds form the backdrop to the bustling traffic of buses, tractors, bullock carts, office clerks and entrepreneurs on motorcycles, a few fancy cars for those enjoying more status, and lots of school kids.

When we reach Valaichennai, the main road branches off to the interior, through a lengthy stretch of jungle, to the historical town of Polonnaruwa and the country's capital Colombo. Alternatively, the northward journey – from Valaichennai to Trincomalee – traverses Vakarai and Verugal, some 60 kilometres of sparsely inhabited coastline intersected by lagoon mouths and rivers. While these natural obstacles have long impeded travel along this route, the main reason for its poor accessibility was a different one: from the early 1990s to 2007, this area was controlled by the LTTE. Travellers to Trincomalee would thus take a long detour via Habarana. This is in fact somewhat paradigmatic of the region's infrastructural geography: its axial connections tend to point inland, connecting coastal hubs and harbours with the island's centre and the west coast. The region's two railroads – from Colombo to Batticaloa and Trinco respectively – follow this pattern, and so do most of the busy roads. The cluster of settlements around Trincomalee town is surrounded by jungle, both to the north and the

Map 3A: Eastern Province, Sri Lanka



south. Along the Koddigar Bay (which shelters the town's long-known natural harbour) we find sizable Muslim, or Tamil-Muslim towns like Kinniya, Muthur, and Tampalagamam. The coastline north of Trincomalee town is not densely populated. Lagoons, jungle, pockets of agricultural land and fishery villages follow on to each other, until we reach Pulmoddai, the northernmost town of the Eastern Province, where the Kokkilai lagoon provides a natural boundary. From here, it is only some 40 kilometres to Mullaitivu in the Vanni, the former core of the LTTE's territory, but it was only in 2011 that a motorable road was re-opened along this part of the coast.

Sri Lanka's eastern coastline is thus home to two main population clusters – around the Koddigar Bay, and the sequence of towns around Batticaloa and Kalmunai – interspersed with much less populated, forested areas, which became LTTE hideouts during the war. Much of the seaboard comprises very narrow strips of land, separated from the interior by smaller or larger lagoons. Beyond these waters lie Sri Lanka's northeastern plains, a large swath of agricultural land, jungle and scattered rocks sticking out above the horizon towards the foothills of the central highlands. Wet-rice cultivation continues to be a vital component of everyday life in eastern Sri Lanka, both for livelihoods and in terms of socio-cultural organisation, self-identification and political symbolism. This applies to the coastal towns (paddy fields often start right at the town limit), but most obviously to the settlements further inland. The towns and villages in the interior parts of the Eastern Province derive much of their *raison d'être* from irrigated rice. The many channels and reservoirs of older and modern irrigation systems mark the lay of the land. Small pockets with trees, houses and temples lie like islands in a sea of paddy, parted by the main roads – often straight like a ruler – connecting towns like Kantale and Ampara⁴¹, the local hubs of marketing and administration, with the outside. The majority of the inhabitants of these areas are Sinhalese, and although there is evidence of a much older Sinhala presence, many of their settlements are in fact colonies of more recent date. That brings us to the history of eastern Sri Lanka: a minefield of genealogical claims, waxing and waning orders, contested boundaries and modern territoriality.

The east of Sri Lanka was never itself a main centre of power. Rather, it has long been a borderland between the spheres of influence of kingdoms elsewhere on the island, maritime trade and foreign invasions. Over the centuries, the region

⁴¹ With the increasing Sinhala presence, the formerly common Tamil names of these and other towns – Amparai and Kantalai – have largely disappeared from official use.

oscillated between a strategic frontier where different external rulers elbowed for influence, and a neglected backwater where infrastructure eroded and population plummeted due to out-migration and diseases like malaria. The Ruhuna kingdom (3rd Century BCE), the Anuradhapura kingdom (4th to 10th Century CE), the Polonnaruwa kingdom (12th Century CE), and the Kandy kingdom (16th to 19th Century CE) expanded their sphere of influence into the east and used its access to the sea.⁴² Sea farers from India (the supposed origin of both Sinhalese and Tamils), Arab traders⁴³ (from the 9th Century onwards), the Chola invasion from south India (10th and 11th Century CE) and colonial conquests, mainly by the Portuguese (17th Century CE), the Dutch (17th and 18th Century CE) and the British (1795-1948 CE) left marks on the region as well (Gaasbeek 2010a: 49-83; McGilvray 2008: 55-96; Peebles 1990). East Sri Lanka's religious, cultural and linguistic patchwork is a reflection of this diverse and convoluted history. The region's population groups have a long track record of intermingling, migration, religious conversion, inter-marriage, cultural assimilation, and economic interdependence. To some extent, this remains true today, but the modern history of war and ethnicised politics have put severe pressure on such boundary crossings.

Archaeological findings and religious chronicles have been a fertile source of inspiration for particularistic interpretations of the region's history. Both Tamil and Sinhala nationalists claim roots and rights in the east, but the underlying reasoning tends to skew history into a "charter of rights" (Peebles 1990) and often tells us more about the present than about the past (Shastri 1990; Spencer 1990; Stokke 1998; Stokke and Ryntveit 2000). Exclusivist historic readings and homeland discourses sit uncomfortably with the fact that the east was always a borderland, a region of intermingling or confrontation, but never of sustained homogeneity. Moreover, the bulk of the evidence informs us about eastern Sri Lanka's history of rule – the kingdoms, capitals, tax systems, and religious establishments – but it tells us relatively little about the supposed subjects of rule: the everyday life, identities, beliefs and loyalties of the people who inhabited the region over the centuries. While there is evidence of their (written) language and their worship customs, this does not warrant categorizing them as a particular people, a nation, or an ethnic group. Firstly, these modern labels are unlikely to have had any meaning at the time, and secondly the markers of

⁴² While there have plausibly been cultural, religious and trade influences from the north (e.g. when the Cholas ruled both north and east), there is no evidence that the Jaffna kingdom (13th to 17th Century CE) ever projected much power along the east coast. This provides a challenge for Tamil nationalist interpretation that claims a historic presence of a traditional and undivided Tamil homeland in the northeast to argue for an independent Tamil state.

⁴³ As well as Sufi spiritual leaders from Lakshadweep and other parts of the Indian Ocean region and – allegedly – Pathan traders.

today's identity logic (e.g. Buddhists are Sinhalese, Hindus are Tamil, Sinhala speakers are Sinhalese) seem to have been different or less obvious in the past. Religious, linguistic and genealogical categories did not always align (Gaasbeek 2010a; McGilvray 2008; Sitrampalam 2005; Spencer 1990).

The actual demographic patterns and ethnic geography that emerged over time forms a persistent challenge to exclusivist ethno-political projections on the region. A Sinhalised reading of the history of the east coast cannot reason away the overwhelming evidence of Tamil and Muslim presence. Moreover, the cherished political unity of the island is in fact a legacy of British rule, with no pre-colonial precedent. Conversely, the claim of an undivided Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka's northeast is faced with older and newer Sinhala presence and the salient historical differences between north and east. The largest geographical challenge for the idea of Tamil Eelam (an independent Tamil homeland) lies with the Muslims, however, who have a long-time and relatively populous presence along the east coast. Tamil nationalists have often conveniently subsumed the Muslims under the banner of "Tamil-speaking people" (rendering them Islamic Tamils), but while the Muslims acknowledge the close historic, linguistic and socio-cultural ties with the Tamils, this political co-option has never gone unquestioned and has capsized spectacularly with the onslaught of Tamil militia violence against the Muslims in the 1990s. The Muslims, in turn, continue to grapple with defining themselves as an ethnic group (Knoezer 1998; McGilvray 1998; 2008; McGilvray and Raheem 2007; O'Sullivan 1999a; 1999b), and attempts to mimic Sinhala and Tamil ethno-territorial claims never gained much credibility, partly because their interspersed settlement pattern defies a contiguous area to lay political claims on.

Eastern Sri Lanka is thus subject to competing claims and historic interpretation, but exclusivist readings from each of the three ethnic groups face contradictions and counterfactuals. The very unit of eastern Sri Lanka is in many ways a residual category, a borderland inhabited by multiple groups bought together by what they are not: i.e. not Kandy or Jaffna. On a more administrative note, the Eastern Province is a somewhat artificial colonial category. In fact, its initial boundaries were a result of cunning British gerrymandering *avant la lettre*. They deliberately joined the Tamil-speaking coastline with a Sinhala-speaking inland areas that fell within Kandy's sphere of influence, thus breaking up the surface area of the last Sinhala kingdom that resisted colonial occupation (Peebles 1990; Perera 1997). Alongside the tinkering with administrative boundaries to establish

demographic or political supremacy⁴⁴, irrigation schemes have long been an important form of territoriality, a technology of claiming and ruling eastern Sri Lanka. And that continues to be true today.

Sri Lanka's east coast is part of an ecological area known as the northeastern Dry Zone. It receives much less rainfall than the island's southwest, which constrains the potential time and space for rain-fed cultivation. Irrigation efforts – rain-fed reservoirs ("tanks") and river diversions – go back as far as the Anuradhapura kingdom, but were subsequently abandoned, leaving the region prone to malaria, destitution and out-migration. From the mid-19th Century onwards, the British colonial administration attempted to re-develop large-scale irrigation efforts – the Allai and Kantale Scheme (Gaasbeek 2010a) were prime examples. The ambition to develop the Dry Zone and turn the sparsely inhabited jungle region into inhabitable and cultivatable land gained momentum in the post-independence era. The Gal Oya scheme, in the southern half of the Eastern Province, was initiated in 1949 and opened up a large tract of irrigated rice fields. These were to be cultivated by newly settled farmers, many of whom came from outside the province (Manogaran 1994; McGilvray 2008; Muggah 2008; Peebles 1990; Uphoff 2003). New settlement schemes, illegal squatters and other forms of migration⁴⁵ had significant demographic effects. The Sinhalese proportion in the Eastern Province rose from 4 per cent in 1911 to 25 per cent in 1981, with much larger shifts in particular localities.⁴⁶ The influx of Sinhala settlers sparked controversy and the irrigation schemes cum "ethnic colonisation" became a common ingredient of the oppositional discourse of Tamil political leaders in the 1950s and 1960s. These concerns intensified in the 1970s and 1980s with the Mahaweli programme, which aspired to irrigate large swaths of land throughout the northeast with water from the Mahaweli Ganga.⁴⁷ The scheme became a peculiar conjunction of development (technological advancement, hydropower dams, food security), governmentality (moving populations around, turning jungle into agriculture, creating powerful new authorities), and Sinhala ethno-nationalism (reinvigorating a glorious past of Sinhala civilisation and "ancient" sites,

⁴⁴ There are many examples of this. In 1958, Ampara District was carved out of (the Tamil dominated) Batticaloa District to create an area with a significant Sinhala population and few Tamils. The creation of the Seruwila Electorate – after the reform of the electoral system in 1978 – patched together all the Sinhala dominated divisions of Trincomalee District. Much more recently, in 2011, controversy arose around the creation of a new DS division just north of Trincomalee District. This provided the mostly Sinhala inhabitants with an administration that spoke their language, but it also provided structural administrative confirmation of the Sinhala colonies created under the – highly sensitive – Weli Oya irrigation scheme (discussed below), and it set a precedent in creating the first non-Tamil division in Mullaitivu District.

⁴⁵ This was also lubricated by the opening of the railway line to Trincomalee in the 1920s.

⁴⁶ Though the increasing percentage of Sinhalese in the Eastern Province marks a salient – and politically sensitive – change in Sri Lanka's demographic history, these figures need to be seen in light of a broader set of changes, including overall demographic growth, and a range of other population movements, such as the pull to Colombo, Indian Tamils leaving the Upcountry plantations and migration to foreign countries.

⁴⁷ The island's largest river, which runs from the highlands to the Koddiiyar Bay.

“millennial visions” with reference to Buddhist chronicles, political appropriation by leading Sinhala nationalist figures) (Brow 1996; Brow and Weeramunda 1992; Korf 2005; 2009; Manogaran 1994; Moore 1985; Spencer 1990; Tennekoon 1988; Woost 1993; 1994).

The Mahaweli programme was similar to irrigation efforts in preceding decades, but the political context had changed. In the 1980s, ethno-nationalist forces and territorial contention had gained momentum. One of the latest, and probably most controversial sub-system of the Mahaweli programme was the Weli Oya scheme (EROS 2005 [1988]; UTHR[J] 1983).⁴⁸ Located at the narrow connection between the Northern and Eastern Province (see Map 3A), Weli Oya derived its significance from its ability to “wedge” the Tamil-speaking “demographic contiguity” between the northeast, and thus its ability to make (or break) geographical sense of Tamil Eelam. Weli Oya became an embattled space. Sri Lanka’s minority question had started to turn violent, and the presence of Sinhala settlers gained military strategic importance. Vigilante groups (so-called home guards), security forces and armed rebels entered the scene.⁴⁹ It was in places like Weli Oya that eastern Sri Lanka’s political and symbolic tussles over genealogical claims and territorial belonging continued in much more direct and violent form. The LTTE and other Tamil militias attacked Sinhala colonies, killing the inhabitants or chasing them away. Government forces joined the villagers in defending their turf. With time, the northeastern frontier became a frontline. Ethnic settlement patterns became an intricate part of warfare; forced evictions, human shielding and enforced ethnic loyalties were central to military strategy. With time, the patchwork of ethnic enclaves was to become a militarised geography with LTTE and government-controlled zones, a territoriality that was articulated through checkpoints, roundups, assassinations and other forms of violence and coercion.

The war did not come to eastern Sri Lanka in one big bang that turned the region into a war zone. While 1983 – the “Black July” anti-Tamil pogroms – is conventionally taken as the starting point of the war, it was only from 1985 onwards, that violence escalated in the east (Bavinck 2011; Gaasbeek 2010a: 139-194). Guerrillas on bicycles had started to permeate the region, and they staged small-scale attacks or instigated uproar. While ethnic geography, historic

⁴⁸ Known in Tamil as Manal Aru. According to a pamphlet disseminated by the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS) at the time: “The establishment of the Vali-Oya scheme and its blatant expansionism is the thin end of the wedge to fragment the North-East Tamil traditional region permanently and with disastrous consequences for our people.” (EROS 2005 [1988]: 318).

⁴⁹ For a current discussion on home guards, see Tudor Silva’s recent article (2010).

interpretations and irrigation-based settlement patterns are an important part of the story, the war that engulfed eastern Sri Lanka was not simply the turning violent of regional settlement politics. It does not warrant a twist to Clausewitz' cliché analogy that war was the continuation of irrigation with other means. To understand why the war escalated we need to look beyond the east. Much in line with the region's history, the dominant protagonists did not come from the east itself. Most key events and turning points in the run-up to the war took place in the political chambers of Colombo, the separatist echelons of the Jaffna peninsula, or further afield. The next section thus turns to the wider background and conceptual interpretation of Sri Lanka's armed conflict.

3.2. Political contestation and armed conflict in Sri Lanka

The different dimensions of the political geography perspective discussed in chapter 2 all surface in the voluminous literature on the multi-causal background of Sri Lanka's armed conflict. At the heart of all these issues and dimensions, we find the island's democratic politics; more specifically the way democratic antagonism articulated the state, and the way it fanned the flames of competing ethno-nationalisms. In taking this perspective, this dissertation joins hands with well-rehearsed analyses, including those put forward by Bastian (1999; 2003), Coomaraswamy (2003), Goodhand and Klem (2005), Moore (1985), Spencer (2007; 2008), Uyangoda (2007; 2011), Venugopal (2009), and Wickramasinghe (2006). Sri Lanka did not have an anti-colonial resistance movement that could serve as a jumping board after independence for the kind of developmental nationalism that we have seen in many other post-colonies, such as the regional super-power India. Instead, the relatively smooth introduction of universal suffrage (1931) and self-rule (1948) provided the island with a heritage of British-inspired political institutions and an anglicised multi-ethnic class of political leaders. While the newly independent country's most pronounced material rift was the class divide, it was the ethnic divide that subsequently set the tone in Sri Lanka's politics. The democratic trappings of the state compelled the political upper class to seek legitimacy among their impoverished, Tamil- and Sinhala-speaking constituencies. This resulted in a process of "ethnic outbidding", most obviously among Sinhala leaders, but among the Tamil and (later) Muslim leadership as well. Competition between Sri Lanka's two main political parties – the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) – can be placed along a left-right continuum, but when push came to shove, this capitalist-socialist opposition was invariably trumped by leaders playing the ethnic card:

invoking Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinist sentiments and calling into question the patriotic (Sinhala) credentials of their opponents.⁵⁰ Lower class political formations fell prey to a similar dynamic. Leftist revolutionary movements sacrificed cross-ethnic proletarian grievances for the more particularistic agendas of mono-ethnic segments of the underclass. Both the Sinhala Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna⁵¹ (JVP) and some of the Tamil rebel movements embraced a Marxist ideology of sorts, but steered a singularly ethno-nationalist course in challenging the state.⁵²

Of course, ethno-nationalist sentiments did not come out of the blue with initiation of mass politics. In Spencer's words: "Some of was quite old, some quite new, and quite a bit was borrowed from elsewhere." (2008: 614) Longer historical trajectories include the emergence of "Protestant Buddhism" (the anti-colonial religious reform propagated by Anagarika Dharmapala around 1900) (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988), and the rise of an educated and privileged class of Jaffna Tamils after the arrival of Christian missionaries (from the early 19th Century onwards) (Wilson 2000). Competing ethno-nationalisms gained momentum after Sri Lanka's independence and often propagated rather selective interpretations of history to legitimise political claims (De Silva 2005; Spencer 1990; 2008; Stokke 1998). Sinhala nationalism cherished a discourse of "re-awakening" a somewhat mythical, "virtuous" Buddhist society, which had supposedly been thwarted by colonialism. It also identified "the state" as self-evidently responsible for providing resources, nurturing development and protecting Buddhist society. This process worked to "invite the masses into history", put village life on a pedestal as "the real Lanka", and make the triad of stupa (Buddhist monument), tank (irrigation reservoir) and paddy field (irrigated rice) the hallmark of celebrating the Sinhala nation (Brow 1996; Brow and Weeramunda 1992; Moore 1985; Robinson 1975; Spencer 1990; Tennekoon 1988; Woost 1994). The use of development programmes as a vessel for Sinhala nationalism helped circumvent class inequalities; it bound the elite and rural communities together in "a nation of villages" (Woost 1994).⁵³ Post-

⁵⁰ In Venugopal's words (2009), the UNP and SLFP leadership consisted of "cosmopolitan capitalists" and "sectarian socialists".

⁵¹ Sinhala for People's Liberation Front.

⁵² This was clearly manifest, for example, in the continued marginalisation of the ("Indian") Tamils working on the upcountry estates – who may be seen as the epitome both of an exploited underclass (supposedly a key issue for the JVP) and of oppressed Tamils (the main agenda of Tamil movements). Neither the JVP, nor the LTTE ever made a persistent issue out of this.

⁵³ This, according to Mick Moore (1985) explains why the Sri Lankan peasantry never organised itself to collectively defend its interests. Instead, it subordinated itself to an elite that alienated crown land, provided welfare, and placed farmers in the spotlight of the nation. Political antagonism fissures thus did not occur along rural/urban, class or caste lines, but on the basis of ethnic polarisation.

independence, we have seen the gradual governmentalisation of society. State institutions, largess, and party politics increasingly penetrated village life.

The enactment of the state as the benefactor of the Sinhala peasant class and the symbolic historic guardian of Sinhala-Buddhist civilisation of course had consequences for the country's minorities, particularly when it came to "redressing" colonial Sinhala grievances around the relatively privileged position of the professional class of Jaffna Tamils, whose (missionary sponsored) education and English skills were a valuable ticket to public sector employment. What was presented as affirmative action towards the non-English speaking rural class thus – in part – became anti-minority legislation. The "Sinhala Only" policy, the "standardisation" (introduction of quota) in higher education, and the changing fortunes in public sector employment, were an immediate bone of contention. Though some of these measures were in fact beneficial for the Tamil and Muslim underclass in the northeast, they were met with staunch opposition from the Jaffna- and Colombo-based Tamil leadership. The minorities of all social strata were united, however, in their disgruntlement over symbolically important measures – changes in the name of country (Ceylon became Sri Lanka), the flag (portraying the "Sinhala" lion), and the constitutional privilege granted to Buddhism. The frontier dynamics of the northeast and the controversy around "land colonisation" must be placed within these overall political trends. The Tamil political leadership framed the combination of a relative lack of investment in public infrastructure and economic opportunities⁵⁴, and the influx of Sinhala "colonists" in the newly constructed settlements in irrigation schemes as a form of neo-colonialism. These lawyer-politicians, who had typically been part of the colonial elite, staunchly opposed all the above measures with reference to their own interpretation of history: the "traditional homeland" of the "Tamil-speaking people" in the northeast and the precedent of a Jaffna kingdom, which had been recognised by Dutch colonial rulers, and which was only unified with the rest of the country because of British colonial rule. When several attempts to broker a principled agreement on the minority question were purposefully shelved by the government⁵⁵, the Tamil leadership drifted towards a more radical position: from rights and relative autonomy, to federalism, to secession (De Silva 1997).

⁵⁴ Tamil MPs were almost invariably in the opposition and were thus less able to channel patronage to their regions.

⁵⁵ The leading Tamil politician S.J.V. Chelvanayakam reached a formal agreement with the government twice – once with the SLFP, once with the UNP – but neither agreement was implemented. The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact of 1957 was to devolve administrative powers to newly established regional councils. The pact accepted Tamil as an official administrative language in the north and east and restricted Sinhala colonisation through irrigation schemes in the east. However, Prime-Minister Bandaranaike received heavy criticism from Sinhala nationalists within his own coalition and Buddhist monks, and the agreement was shelved. A modified version of the pact was agreed after secret negotiations in 1965 between Chelvanayakam and Prime-Minister to be, Dudley Senanayake of the UNP. Once in office, Senanayake abrogated the pact and the stipulated District Councils did not materialise (Wilson 1994; De Silva 2005).

Several parties joined ranks in the Tamils United Liberation Front (TULF) and formally declare the Tamil right to self-determination in the so-called Vaddukoddai resolution of 1976.⁵⁶

Both the Tamil and the Sinhala political elite were outflanked by more militant political formations that sprung up from their own constituencies. As a result of improved living conditions, higher education and a rising marriage age, “youth” had emerged as a new social category. Unmarried people in their twenties – many of whom were university educated, but unemployed – proved to be a potent political base for violent revolutionaries (Gamage 1997; Hettige 2004; Venugopal 2009). In the south, the JVP sprung up and successfully mobilised youth, mainly those from lower class backgrounds outside the traditional urban centres. It staged a dramatic uprising in the 1970s against the corrupted elite that failed to create opportunities for the lower-class. The movement resurrected itself in the 1980s, but this time it got embroiled in the ethnic question as well. The insurgents attacked the government for compromising on the Tamil issue (Gamage 1997; Gunasinghe 2004 [1984]; Hettige 1997). On the Tamil side, the gentlemen politicians of the TULF were sidelined by a whole flurry of Tamil youth movements who resorted to violent strategies, not just against the Sinhala-dominated state structures, but against Tamil “traitors” as well. With support from the Indian government – concerned about Sri Lanka’s pro-Western course and its own Tamil secessionists in Tamil Nadu – the Eelamist Tamil militias were increasingly able to cause disarray (Balasingham 2004; Bullion 1995; De Silva 2005; Hoole et al. 1992; Hoole 2001; Wilson 1994).

The political turbulence around Sri Lanka’s competing ethno-nationalisms entered its most combustible phase in the late 1970s. On the back of an economic crisis, the UNP entered office in 1977 with an unprecedented majority and introduced an economic reform package (liberalisation and privatisation combined with state investment in modernist schemes like the Mahaweli programme) and a fundamental redesign of the country’s political architecture (introduction of a powerful Executive Presidency and an electoral system of Proportional Representation). This set in motion a whole set of cardinal changes in Sri Lanka’s political economy, both intended and unintended. Some of these aggravated the minority question. The rhetoric around restoring the ancient glory of Sinhala-Buddhist civilisation, the strong guardian-state, and ruthless development

⁵⁶ The key line of the resolution read: “restoration and reconstitution of the Free, Sovereign, Secular Socialist State of Tamil Eelam based on the right of self determination inherent to every nation has become inevitable in order to safeguard the very existence of the Tamil Nation in this Country.” (TULF 1976)

planning reached new heights. Liberalisation was followed by remarkable economic growth, but did not resolve lower-class grievances and dismay about corruption and cronyism (Dunham 2004; Dunham and Jayasuriya 2001; Dunham and Kelagama 1994; Dunham and Kelagama 1995; Gunasinghe 2004 [1984]; Hettige 2004). And the island's ideological turn and international alignment (mainly the UNP's close ties to the United States) caused upset in Delhi (Destradi 2010; De Votta 2010; Dixit 2003). Over the next few years, these domestic and international dynamics would culminate into a full-blown JVP insurgency, a Tamil separatist war, and a humiliating Indian intervention on Sri Lankan soil.

The anti-Tamil pogroms of July 1983⁵⁷ – inscribed in Sri Lanka's collective conscience as Black July – marked the turning point where simmering ethnic tension became ethnic violence, where separatist rhetoric and political bravado turned into state-sponsored atrocities and terrorist attacks. A chaotic period ensued with a whole range of (Indian-sponsored) Tamil militias attacking government military, civilian offices, and each other (Hoole et al. 1992; Hoole 2001). Following four years of violence, India imposed itself as a patron of the Tamil movements and forced an agreement on the Sri Lankan government. The so-called Indo-Lankan Accord⁵⁸ of 1987 preserved the island's unity, but granted concessions to the Tamil separatists (mainly the devolution of power to a newly created Provincial Council of a merged Northeast), and it paved the way for the deployment of a large Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) (Balasingham 2004; Dixit 2003; Loganathan 1996; 2006). The Rajiv Gandhi administration had prided itself with a Pyrrhic victory, however. The LTTE, which had emerged as the main military Tamil faction, turned its back on the agreement and Sri Lanka's newly elected Premadasa government sought to sabotage it as well. The war resumed, and – with no peace to keep, both parties opposing them, and rising casualties – India withdrew the IPKF. The LTTE had suffered great losses at the hands of the Indian counter-insurgency, but having withstood the regional hegemon, it resuscitated itself with a bolstered morale and a battle-hardened core of cadres. It took revenge on Delhi (with a lethal suicide attack on Rajiv Gandhi in 1991) and started to give concrete shape to its secessionist state ambitions on the Jaffna peninsula (until they were driven out in 1995) and other parts of the northeast.

⁵⁷ A rebel attack on a police patrol sparked a skirmish when the coffins of the victims were flown to Colombo, which in turn set in motion a period of – systematic and spontaneous – mob attacks and violent clashes, primarily targeting Tamil neighbourhoods, shops, houses, and families.

⁵⁸ The Indo-Lankan Accord was in fact the capstone to a sequence of Indian efforts including the All Party Conference (1984), the Thimpu Talks (1985), and the Political Party Conference in Bangalore (1986).

With the exception of a brief spell of negotiations in the mid-1990s, hostilities continued throughout this decade. Both armies continued to increase and professionalise their military capacities and inflicted heavy losses on each other and the civilian population. In the south, LTTE attacks on sensitive economic, political or religious targets caused grief, fear and anger; in the northeast, society suffered the double yoke of a ruthless army (checkpoints, arrests, disappearances, torture, killings, rape) and the LTTE (forced recruitment, extortion cum taxation, liquidations, brutal punishments) (Alison 2003; Brun 2008; De Mel 2007; Gaasbeek 2010a; Hoole et al. 1992; Hoole 2001; Sarvananthan 2007; Trawick 1997; Walker 2010). In and around the main urban centres of the northeast – Jaffna, Trincomalee, Batticaloa – a peculiar form of hybrid rule emerged. These towns were formally controlled by government forces, but the LTTE had a strong if often invisible presence and exerted its power over people's everyday life and the state bureaucracy. In the more sparsely populated areas, mainly the Vanni (where the LTTE leadership moved its headquarters in the late 1990s), the rebels went largely unchallenged. They created an elaborate façade of state-like institutions (offices, courts, police, banks) larded with symbolic measures (national days, hymns, audio-visual propaganda), which served to institutionalise a *de facto* Tamil Eelam and consolidate the LTTE's grip on the region (Fuglerud 2009; Korf et al. 2010a; McGilvray 1997; Sarvananthan 2007; Stokke 2006; Uyangoda 2007; Whitaker 1997). Almost without exception, alternative sources of power were either eradicated (moderate politicians, rival militias), or drawn into the movement's orbit (religious institutions, community-level organisations, the remaining skeleton of the government bureaucracy).⁵⁹ People's livelihoods and the aid industry were implicated by these hybrid arrangements as well (Goodhand and Hulme 1999; Goodhand et al. 2000; Hyndman and De Alwis 2004; Korf 2004; 2006a; Korf and Fünfgeld 2006; Walker 2010). Hundreds of thousands were displaced, with large social, economic and political consequences (Amirthalingam and Lakshman 2009; Brun 2003) and for many, the "money order economy" became a primary source of survival. Labour migration after the 1977 reforms, and the massive out-migration of Tamils fleeing the war after 1983 (often in the footsteps of relations who had gone in earlier times) created a significant Sri Lankan diaspora. Migrant networks provided a financial lifeline for some and they lubricated the circulation of ideas and foreign influences as well as the proliferation of religious reform movements. The Tamil diaspora also became a

⁵⁹ Whitaker's (1997) analysis insightfully describes how this process unfolded in the Mandur area (Batticaloa District). He illustrates how the military and political projections of power implicate the region, but he also emphasises that pre-existing squabbles, issues, and orders continue to play a role, for example through temple politics.

central plank in the LTTE's global tax and propaganda network (Cheran 2001; Fuglerud 1991; Gunaratna 2001; Jazeel 2010; Keller 2001; McDowell 1996; Sriskandarajah 2002; Wayland 2004).

The competing projects of rule of the LTTE and the government produced a peculiar warscape (Korf et al. 2010a) in eastern Sri Lanka, to use the catchphrase coined in chapter 2. The towns were considered "cleared area" (government-controlled) and the forested regions "uncleared" (LTTE-controlled), with much of the region stuck somewhere in the middle ("grey"). The region's multi-ethnic checkerboard geography severely complicated the picture. As described in section 3.1, the east has many Sinhala towns and colonies and sizable Muslim settlements. Moreover, the government and the LTTE considered eastern Sri Lanka neither their main home base, nor their main priority, although the east was an important recruiting base for the rebels. The east often functioned as a secondary front, subservient to the main battlefield in the north. Though there was widespread Tamil support for the Tamil cause, the LTTE was not seen as a movement that originated from the east. For that reason, eastern Sri Lanka is a particularly interesting region to shed light on a more general analytical point in relation to the war. The above historical summary has foregrounded the Sinhala-Tamil cleavage, which evolved into a government-LTTE war. While this is indeed the pivotal issue, it would be a mistake to suggest we are faced with a bipolar struggle between two coherent groups. In fact, Sri Lanka's political crisis has involved a welter of conflicts with many different lines of contention. The JVP rebellions (pitting young Sinhala radicals against the mainstream political elite) are the bloodiest example, but the fierce antagonism between the two main parties (UNP and SLFP) has also involved electoral violence and political thuggery (Bastian 2003; Gunasinghe 2004 [1984]; Höglund and Piyaarathne 2009; Uyangoda 2010; Venugopal 2009). This intra-elite rivalry fuelled ethno-nationalist sentiments and impeded the search for a solution to the minority question. Also, there has been a large amount of intra-Tamil violence and – perhaps most significantly – Sri Lanka's third ethnic group, the Muslims, severely complicated the bipolar conception of Sri Lanka's conflict. These latter two points become particularly clear in the east.

While the east is not the political origin of either the LTTE or Sinhala nationalism⁶⁰, it has brought forward two other ethno-nationalist formations.

⁶⁰ Some of the Buddhist sites in the east have become repositories for Sinhala nationalism. It is clear, however, that the Sinhala constituencies in the east played a minor role in the coming of age of Sinhala nationalism, if only because many of these settlers were pressured into settling in the colonies of 20th Century irrigation schemes. As the

Firstly, there were many Tamil separatist movements with a strong home-grown support base in the east, such as the PLOTE and the EPRLF.⁶¹ However, they were rivals to the LTTE and barely survived the fratricidal violence of the 1980s and their alignment with the IPKF (against the LTTE). The LTTE eradicated the military capacity of these groups, but (partly because of this) its own legitimacy and support base in the east always remained an issue of concern. In addition to the longer historic, cultural, and linguistic differences between the north and the east (e.g. in the east the caste system, the dialect and the links with the Muslims are different), there were eastern concerns about the perceived arrogance of the “Jaffna Tamils”, the dominance of northern Tamils in the LTTE leadership, the massive recruitment of eastern youngsters (while upper class Jaffna families had moved abroad), and the movement’s prioritisation of military objectives the north.⁶²

Secondly, it was in the east that Muslim ethno-nationalism took its most pronounced form. While the Muslims live scattered across the island, their most populous concentrations lie along the east coast. In parts of Ampara and Trincomalee District the Muslims are in fact the largest group. Muslim ethno-nationalism was an ideological latecomer in Sri Lanka. Debates around Muslim identity as separate from the Tamils have a long history, but it was only in the 1980s that these sentiments became manifest in a clear political project. Calls for Muslim rights and political autonomy entered the limelight, and separate Muslim parties emerged, of which the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) was the most important one. Significantly, most of the SLMC founders, leaders, and vote banks were from the east. The timing (1980s) and location (east) tell us a lot about Muslim ethno-nationalism and its political maturation. Two sets of factors conflate here. Firstly, the post-1977 reforms had several effects. Labour migration to the Middle East nurtured more pronounced interpretations of Muslim identity. Politically, the introduction of a Proportional Representation electoral system, which took effect in the 1980s, made a dedicated Muslim party electorally feasible. The second set of factors that fuelled Muslim identity politics has to do with the war. Popular concern about “the Muslim cause” was largely a response to Sri Lanka’s political crisis and the violent onslaught between Sinhala nationalism and Tamil separatism. This became particularly pronounced with the LTTE attempt to establish a separate Tamil Eelam and the so-called “merger”. The

armed conflict evolved, however, the people inhabiting these colonies have become symbolically important as Sinhala frontiersmen, be it farmers, home guards, soldiers or monks (Thangarajah 2003).

⁶¹ Respectively, the People’s Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam and the Eelam People’s Revolutionary Liberation Front.

⁶² Yuvi Thangarajah’s ongoing research sheds useful light on the political history of Tamil rivalry in the east.

administrative merging of the north and east in the 1987 Indo-Lankan Accord threatened to surrender the eastern Muslim community to a Tamil-dominated northeastern region. The emerging rift between the Tamils and Muslims turned violent around 1990. Many Muslims had originally joined or supported eastern Tamil militias in the 1980s, because they shared the Tamil anxieties about Sinhala domination. That collaboration ended abruptly when the LTTE identified the independent Muslim course as a threat. They forcibly evicted the Muslims from the north of the island and staged sensitive attacks in the east, among others with the gunning down of praying Muslims in the mosques of Kattankudy and Eravur (Ismail 1995; Knoezer 1998; Lewer and Ismail 2011; McGilvray and Raheem 2007; Mohideen 2006; Nuhman 2002; O'Sullivan 1999a; 1999b). Muslim politics and calls for Muslim rights and autonomy were there to stay, and from the 1990s onwards, they would play a salient role in the war, in peace efforts, and in post-war dynamics.

The ethnicised politics of post-independence Sri Lanka and the eruption of armed conflict match the borderland status that east Sri Lanka had often had throughout its history. In the 1990s, the region's long-standing patchwork of ethnic enclaves transformed into a militarised geography, where identities and boundaries were under close surveillance. The Tamil, Muslim, and Sinhala community struggled to sustain themselves in the violent confrontation between the government forces and the LTTE. Their lives were engulfed in military tactics that included checkpoints, forced evictions, intimidation, round-ups, curfews, extortion and assassinations. Oscillating between moments of crisis and periods of relative calm, people in eastern Sri Lanka tried to go about their lives, and continued – as best as possible – with school exams, harvesting, weddings, and religious festivals. Local politicians, militiamen, religious leaders, entrepreneurs, bureaucrats and other societal leaders tried to navigate the convoluted configuration of competing and overlapping orders in an attempt to preserve living space for their communities and themselves. Despite the violence and turmoil, these sedimented practices and institutionalised relations resulted in a level of predictability and normalcy. Some of these, however, were to change drastically in the turbulent decade that was to follow.

3.3. A turbulent decade of transition, 2001 - 2011

The decade studied in this dissertation (2001-2011) comprises a transition with far-reaching impacts. The articles included in Part II tend to jump from the

beginning ("war", 2001) to the end ("post-war", 2011) of this decade, so as to capture the big picture. However, there were in fact many in-between phases and intervening developments: a ceasefire and peace talks (2002 and 2003), a split in the LTTE (2004), a tsunami (2005), a resumption of war (2006), the defeat of the LTTE (2009) and many developments that followed in the wake of the government victory (2010-2011). This section discusses this tumultuous chronology, so as to provide a historical grid for the articles in Part II.⁶³

By the year 2000, the war had reached a stalemate. Neither the government's armed forces, nor the LTTE were able to advance and both sides were suffering the costs of war: low morale, economic downturn and great humanitarian consequences. With support from Norwegian mediators, both parties explored the space for peace talks. After the newly elected UNP government assumed office in December 2001⁶⁴, they reached a breakthrough: a ceasefire agreement (February 2002), which also arranged for the deployment of a Nordic monitoring mission (the SLMM⁶⁵). The end of the fighting had immediate effects on the east coast. Checkpoints were lifted, roads were opened, and the railway to Batticaloa resumed service. Government High Security Zones (militarised zones displacing all civilian activity) remained in place, despite protest of the LTTE, which had clear military interests in a freer circulation of civilians. Deserted farmlands were taken into use again, the restrictions on fisheries were gradually eased, and foreign aid agencies took the opportunity to initiate longer-term rehabilitation and development projects (Fernando 2008; Goodhand and Klem 2005; Goodhand et al. 2011a; Keethaponcalan and Jayawardena 2009; Korf 2005; 2006; Korf and Fünfgeld 2005; SLMM 2010; Solnes 2010). The ceasefire agreement also widened the LTTE's space for manoeuvre. The movement's propaganda took the agreement and subsequent peace talks as a sign of formal recognition. The LTTE introduced formal, tax-levying customs at the bigger checkpoints in the north, and in Kilinochchi (in the Vanni) their pseudo-state institutions constructed well-equipped offices, frequently visited by foreign agencies and diplomats wanting to engage with the rebels. The movement also expanded its presence in government-controlled areas – the ceasefire agreement allowed them to move around for "political" activities. While the army was confined to its barracks, LTTE

⁶³ The following overview draws from my joint earlier research with Jonathan Goodhand and Gunnar Sørbo for the evaluation of Norwegian peace efforts in Sri Lanka (chapters 4, 5 and 6 of Goodhand et al. 2011a).

⁶⁴ The previous SLFP-led Kumaratunga government had invited the Norwegians, but the parties could not agree on terms. The downfall of the Kumaratunga government was partly caused by the cross-over of the SLMC, which joined the UNP but struggled with intense internal dissent. Following the death of its founder and leader M.H.M. Ashraff, rivaling factions competed for control of the party. Hakeem – who is from Kandy rather than the east – prevailed, but was unable to prevent many subsequent split offs.

⁶⁵ The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) consisted of a small number of civilian and (unarmed) military monitors from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland.

offices and side organisations mushroomed throughout the east and north. The rebels tightened their grip on the Tamil and Muslim community, who faced increasing difficulty escaping LTTE “taxation” and some of them were kidnapped for ransom (Gaasbeek 2010a).

As a result, tensions between Tamils and Muslims intensified.⁶⁶ Particularly in the east, periodic skirmishes and violent clashes occurred. Several people died in a clash with security forces in Akkaraipattu in October 2002 and in April 2003, there was a sequence of skirmishes in and around Muthur (Gaasbeek 2010a: 255-291). These strings of violence often involved riot-like incidents triggered by specific local issues, but the escalations and de-escalations were clearly related to the wider shifts in the political and military landscape. Direct confrontations between the LTTE and the government forces were rare, but LTTE attempts to move cadres, expand their watch posts, and smuggle people or goods at sea resulted in some tense standoffs. These local crises often exposed the weaknesses in the ceasefire agreement, which did not define frontlines and kept the status of sea movements fuzzy (Fernando 2008; Goodhand et al. 2011a; SLMM 2010; Solnes 2010; UTHR[J] 2002).

While the LTTE and the government played cat and mouse on the ground, they held formal peace talks at the top level. In six rounds of talks in various parts of the world, they took small steps to address humanitarian issues, jointly administer aid to the northeast, and explore political frameworks, but did not reach a significant break-through (Balasingham 2004; Gooneratne 2007; Höglund and Svensson 2009; Moolakkattu 2005; Rupesinghe 2006; Sahadevan 2006). Dissatisfied with the decreasing chances of brokering a secession-like outcome and fearing the fate of being locked into the peace process, the LTTE suspended its participation in April 2003, thus precipitating a crisis. Subsequently, the insurgents proposed an Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA), which amounted to an independent Tamil Eelam in all but name. This exposed the fragile political base of the UNP government. With the rival SLFP controlling the Presidency (Chandrika Kumaratunga), the UNP government was politically vulnerable. This was aggravated by the UNP’s eroding electoral base. The party’s economic reforms had adverse effects on the poor, and it failed to decisively sell

⁶⁶ Despite an agreement signed between SLMC leader Hakeem and LTTE leader Prabhakaran (15 April 2002), which spelled out their intention to improve Tamil-Muslim relations and consult one another on Muslim-related issues discussed during the peace talks. The agreement allowed Muslim farmers to return to their lands, particularly in the east.

its controversial peace efforts.⁶⁷ The ISGA proposal precipitated these dissatisfactions. It invoked public outrage and the president used the occasion to topple the UNP government, by assuming control over key ministries (Goodhand et al. 2011a; Rupesinghe 2006).

While these rivalries and cunning tactics in Colombo followed suit with established patterns of Sri Lankan politicking, the turning point that fundamentally reconfigured the power balance in the country came from a completely unanticipated shift: a split in the LTTE. In March 2004, the LTTE's main figure in the east, Vinyagamoorthy Muralitharan (alias "Karuna Amman"), declared himself independent and incurred the wrath of the LTTE leadership in the Vanni. This fissure was to mark the situation in the east for years to come and drove a key nail in the LTTE's coffin. The LTTE reacted fiercely with a large military offensive, forcing Karuna into hiding with his erstwhile adversary, the government. But with time (and army support) the Karuna faction staged a come back and eventually founded a political party: the TMVP.⁶⁸ Exposing the politically sensitive differences between the north and the east, the Karuna split spurred tension and violence within the Tamil community. People faced coercive enforcement of loyalty from both sides. Received wartime practices for everyday survival came under strain, projects of rule were re-shuffled, and violent incidents became harder to predict and attribute (Fernando 2008; Goodhand et al. 2009; Goodhand 2010; Human Rights Watch 2004a; 2004b).⁶⁹

The LTTE's initially successful campaign against Karuna was interpreted as the prologue for an all-out resumption of war. The movement's rhetoric became more aggressive and it started to prepare large numbers of civilians for combat. The escalation was cut short, however, by another unanticipated disaster: the Boxing Day tsunami (December 2004), which outdid the war damage, at least in the short run. While almost the entire coastline was affected, casualty figures ran highest in the densely populated Muslim (and Tamil) settlements along the east coast. The narrow grids of houses right along the shore left little space for escape. Many thousands drowned in the rising sea and whole neighbourhoods were reduced to rubble (Frerks and Klem 2011; Telford et al. 2006). The massive aid response that gained momentum in the following weeks and months exposed the many controversies around the region's ethno-political geography. Buffer

⁶⁷ Much has been written about the UNP's ill-conceived adaptation of the Liberal Peace dogma (Bastian 2007; 2011; Goodhand and Klem 2005; Goodhand and Walton 2009; Orjuela 2011; Stokke and Uyangoda 2011; Venugopal 2011; Walton 2008a). While this was a key issue in the peace process and the downfall of the UNP nationally, most of the liberal peace debate does not lend itself so well to make sense of the ground realities in the northeast.

⁶⁸ TMVP stands for Tamil Makkal Viduthala Pulikal (Tamil People's Liberation Tigers).

⁶⁹ Forthcoming work by Ariel Sánchez-Meertens will discuss this in detail.

zones along the coast necessitated the relocation of large groups of people. This reinvigorated the many tussles over belonging – territorial claims to do with caste, ethnicity, religion, and political affinities. The massive influx of NGOs, inter-governmental organisations, bilateral donors and private initiatives also caused excitement in the previously rather secluded east coast. Large numbers of expats settled down in the regional hubs and in some cases provoked disturbance and cultural anxiety (Fernando and Hilhorst 2011; Fraser 2005; Gaasbeek 2010b; Hyndman 2007; Korf 2010; Korf et al. 2010b; McGilvray 2006; McGilvray and Gamburd 2010; Ruwanpura 2008; Shanmugaratnam 2005; Stirrat 2006). The moral panic about an alleged porn movie featuring the sexual abuse of a local Sri Lankan woman circulating among western NGOs (Gaasbeek 2010b: 139-140) exposed a more fundamental concern with foreign influences, cultural tradition, gender roles and rumours of conversions by Christian agencies. The resemblance with the post-war moral panic described in article 4 is remarkable. The large aid budgets (and concurrent spending pressure) caused conflicts over distribution and political appropriation. This occurred at all levels, from inter-personal jealousy in refugee camps all the way up to the stalled peace talks. Efforts were made to resume the talks on the basis of a shared government-LTTE framework for tsunami aid in the northeast. The framework never materialised, however, and rather than a nucleus for collaboration it proved to be a bone of contention. Sinhala nationalist groups cried havoc and Muslim leaders feared a formalised LTTE role in aid governance (Frerks and Klem 2011; Goodhand et al. 2011c; McGilvray 2006; McGilvray and Gamburd 2010; Rainford and Sathunanathan 2011).

The tsunami crisis only briefly interrupted the cadence of violent incidents. Particularly in the east, attacks and assassinations continued. The ambushing of Kaushalyan (the LTTE's new eastern leader) in February 2005, the death of Joseph Pararajasigham (a respected Tamil politician) who got shot during Christmas mass (December 2005), and the murder of five youngsters by the army in the middle of Trincomalee town (January 2006) were three salient examples. The LTTE meanwhile expanded the killing spree to the south. Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar died at the hands of a sniper in the pool of his Colombo villa in August 2005. The LTTE incurred fierce international condemnation. In the east, so-called "white van" kidnappings and killings (a grim feature of government deaths quads during the second JVP insurgency) entered the scene. Apparently random people got forced or lured into white vans. Many of

them never returned and no one claimed responsibility (Goodhand et al. 2009; Goodhand 2010).

Direct hostilities between the government and the LTTE escalated after the presidential elections of November 2005. Having campaigned on an agenda of Sinhala dignity and critical rhetoric towards the Norwegians, the ceasefire and the fledgling peace talks, Mahinda Rajapaksa triumphed, but once in office, he was confronted with an almost daily sequence of LTTE attacks on security personnel, mainly in the north. Government-instigated violence against civilians also continued, for example with a series of bomb blasts, arson and mob violence in Tamil and Muslim shops in Trincomalee town in April 2005. An LTTE suicide squad nearly succeeded in killing the army chief, and this caused the government to initiate a tit for tat exchange with an air raid on LTTE-controlled territory just south of Trincomalee. Open war eventually started in August 2006. In line with the region's history of contested irrigation (cum colonisation), it was a crisis over a sluice gate that eventually triggered full-scale territorial offensives. Mimicking the government strategy of curtailing resources and aid supplies, the LTTE blocked irrigation flows to thousands of farmers (many of whom were Sinhala) at Mavil Aru, the sensitive multi-ethnic area in the south of Trincomalee District. Not unhappy with a symbolically powerful and humane-looking excuse to intervene, the government deployed its air force and army to open the sluice gate. In the ensuing violence, the LTTE overran Muthur, thus displacing the (largely Muslim) population. Within days, the army struck back with heavy artillery and started to conquer not just Muthur, but the entire eastern seaboard (Gaasbeek 2010a; Goodhand et al. 2011a; Hariharan 2010). The LTTE deployed its habitual tactic of human shielding. The shelling of civilian areas, designated refugee camps, and atrocities against domestic aid personnel⁷⁰ were the first signs that the government was determined not to be held back by humanitarian concerns. Bolstered by the troops and intelligence of Karuna, the government demolished the last LTTE base in the east (Topigala, near Batticaloa) in July 2007.

The Muslim community in the meantime was shocked by violent clashes that seemed to completely escape the government-LTTE plot. In Kattankudy, a populous Muslim trading town known for its abundance of Islamic shrines and sects, a turf battle between Wahabi-inspired followers (Tawhid) and one of the new Sufi sects (Payilwan) climaxed with the destruction and desecration of

⁷⁰ Mainly the execution-style killing of seventeen (mostly Tamil) staff of the French NGO Action contre la Faim in the direct aftermath of the battle over Muthur (August 2006).

Payilwan's mosque in December 2006. The sizable minaret was torn down by a group of men carrying heavy-duty equipment and video cameras, suggesting this was a well-prepared intervention not an emotional outrage.⁷¹ The remarkable incident reminds us that eastern Sri Lanka's violent political geography is not confined to Tamil and Sinhala ethno-nationalism and claims on sovereignty, but in fact involves several other struggles over identity politics, purification and territorial belonging. This is an issue we pick up on in article 1.

Fragmentation among the Tamil community also continued. Karuna's TMVP (itself a renegade faction of the LTTE) split yet again when Pillayan, one of Karuna's cadres, broke away. With alternating TMVP offices loyal to either Karuna or Pillayan, both of which were sheltered by the government security forces, making sense of the mutual attacks and scuffles became ever harder (Goodhand 2010; Goodhand et al. 2009; International Crisis Group 2008). Eventually, however, the Rajapaksa government accommodated both factions. The violence subsided and both ex-militiamen became engaged in the government attempt to consolidate its victory over the LTTE in the east. This involved a range of interventions including a broad package of development programmes (labelled the "dawn of the new east"⁷²), the disarmament of factions and "home guards" (vigilantes), and the crafting of an electoral mandate (Goodhand 2010). The electoral dynamic was prompted by the Supreme Court ruling against the northeast merger, which had come into force after the 1987 Indo-Lankan accord. The de-merger split the north and the east once again, thus dissecting the land claimed as Tamil Eelam. The subsequent Eastern Provincial Council (EPC) elections in May 2008 reflected the region's unique tri-ethnic balance, but in fact became a rat race for government patronage. The Tamil ex-militiaman Pillayan, prominent Muslim politicians, and Sinhala strongmen all queued up for a place on the government list, thus securing access to government resources, but diluting their piece of the pie. Most of the patronage, however, was not channelled via the EPC. A hand full of powerful MPs and central government ministries and ex-military commanders assigned to powerful bureaucratic posts came to control most of the resources. In many ways the government resumed the old frontier strategy of controlling space and people through development planning, demographic engineering, gerrymandering, and control over vital hubs and proxies.

⁷¹ The most thorough analysis of these events is provided in Shahul Hasbullah's (unpublished) working papers, and Hasbullah and Korf (2012).

⁷² Known in Sinhala as Negenahira Navodaya.

While the first elements of this strategy became clear in the east, the war raged on in the north. In 2008, government forces made the first incursions into the LTTE-controlled Vanni. Weakened by the Karuna split, its international isolation⁷³, and its refusal to abort its state-like strategy of territorial control, the LTTE was rapidly pushed back into a small part of the eastern Vanni (De Silva-Ranasinghe 2010).⁷⁴ Large numbers of civilians got stuck in the battle zone and the movement forcibly prevented them from escaping. The civilian buffer served to deter government attack; it raised the political fall-out of using heavy artillery and indiscriminate bombing. The government counter-strategy of creating “No Fire Zones”, was aimed at puncturing the enclave of civilians and evicting them from the frontline. Civilians thus became a play ball of a brutal endgame. Many managed to make their way out – often starved, traumatised and after having lost their loved-ones. But tens of thousands remained trapped until the end. Unwilling to accept further delay or risk a last-minute LTTE surprise, government forces pressed on to overrun the last LTTE stronghold in May 2009. The overwhelming firepower of the government navy, army and air force produced a human massacre. The entire LTTE leadership, many of its cadres and large numbers of civilians did not survive the government victory (Human Rights Watch 2008; 2009; UN Panel of Experts 2011; UTHR[J] 2009; Weiss 2011).

Despite increasing pressure from diaspora and somewhat belated international outrage about the humanitarian costs of the last months of the war, the Sri Lankan government desisted any credible investigation into or acknowledgment of what came to be called “alleged war crimes” (Goodhand et al. 2011c; International Crisis Group 2010; 2011a). The so-called “Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Committee” (LLRC) eventually produced a report in late 2011 (LLRC 2011), but eschewed a thorough discussion of the evidence from the war zone. The Rajapaksa government nevertheless received broad popular support, mainly from the Sinhala community, for “liberating the country from terrorism”. Epic parallels were drawn to historic Sinhala kings warding off foreign invasions and protecting Buddhism. During the first post-war Presidential and Parliamentary elections in 2010 (see article 2; see also the pictures on page 90), the government received overwhelming support. As was the case with the Provincial Council elections, this was in part a result of genuine popularity, but also born from the lack of a feasible opposition and the need to tap into

⁷³ Mainly due to the effects of war on terror policies (Goodhand and Klem 2005; Lunstead 2011), and India exercising less restraint after the Congress Party got voted back into office (Destradi 2010; De Votta 2010; International Crisis Group 2011a; Rehman 2009).

⁷⁴ A few months earlier, on 2 November 2007, LTTE political wing leader Tamilselvan died in a government air strike.

government patronage channels. Its solid parliamentary base enabled the government to implement far-reaching reforms and constitutional change. But it took no veritable initiatives to address minority issues and demands for autonomy. To the extent that reforms did take place, they primarily served to secure the regime's position (International Crisis Group 2011b).

The above sketch of the military dynamics around the end of the war and its political developments in its immediate aftermath provides the contours of Sri Lanka's transition in the period 2001-2011. There is a sizable scholarly literature on the developments associated with this transition. In line with the argument of this dissertation, several authors have problematised notions of "peacebuilding" and the terminology associated with "war-to-peace transitions". The compromised role of international players and foreign aid in relation to Sri Lanka's political economy, for example, is well-studied (e.g. Bastian 2007; Goodhand et al. 2011b; Goodhand et al. 2011c; Korf 2006a; Stokke and Uyangoda 2011; Venugopal 2009; Walton 2008a). In this connection, the politicisation of peace-oriented interventions and the fledgling legitimacy of the term "peace", and "civil society organisations" associated with it, have been diagnosed thoroughly (Orjuela 2008; Walton 2008b). Other authors have focused specifically at the spatialised politics of the above-mentioned subjects (Brun and Jazeel 2009; Korf 2006b; 2009; 2011), the interaction between religious dynamics and Sri Lanka's history of political violence (Berkwitz 2008; McGilvray 2011), or ethnographically grounded perspective on the consequences of the tsunami (McGilvray and Gamburd 2010). Scholars have also explored more structural effects of the war on Sri Lankan society, for example through the cultural effects of militarisation (De Mel 2007) and everyday patterns of inter-ethnic relations (Gaasbeek 2010a), and there is an emerging body of work on post-war government strategies and political contestation over it (Goodhand 2010; Jazeel and Ruwanpura 2009; Wickramasinghe 2009).

This dissertation complements this literature by contributing to a more thorough conceptualisation of post-war transition, by providing a political geography perspective (Part I), and by offering four articles, each of which explores eastern Sri Lanka's convoluted transition from a specific angle (Part II). Rather than contradicting overall trends, the articles add different layers and complexity, and they direct our attention to longer-term struggles over Sri Lanka's political geography. Each of these articles conjured up a number of methodological

challenges, to which we will turn in the next chapter. Prior to that, however, the following pages provide some visual illustration of the eastern Sri Lankan context.



Photo 1. The old ferry at Uparu (between Kinniya and Muthur), with the new bridge in the background.



Photo 2. Road works, Trincomalee District

Infrastructural rehabilitation was among the most visible post-war changes in eastern Sri Lanka. New roads and bridges enabled unprecedented mobility, thus reconnecting erstwhile isolated areas with the rest of the country. The reconstruction of the road along the Koddigar Bay – connecting Trincomalee town with Kinniya, Muthur and the coast towards Batticaloa – required the construction of several bridges (**photos 1, 2 and 3**). Muthur, for example, had previously relied on a poorly serviced ferry and a long eroded road through the hinterland. Now, the journey to Trincomalee town can be made any time of day and takes just over a half hour. The roads and drainage inside Muthur town were also done up (**photo 4**).



Photo 3. The new bridge at Ralkuli (right) and its temporary predecessor (left), between Muthur and Kinniya.

Photo 4. Road works in Muthur town.



Photo 5. The entrance gate to the Marble Beach resort, run by the Air Force.



Although military checkpoints disappeared rapidly after the end of the war, the security sector continues to play a salient role on the island. Following the tremendous growth of the armed forces during

the last years of the war, the military now seeks non-military roles. I encountered one striking example of that at Marble Beach, a sandy beach facing the strategic Trincomalee harbour. Formerly a High Security Zone of the Air Force, the site had now become a public beach run by the Air Force. The guards collected entrance and parking tickets from the local

public and ran high-end bungalows for more prosperous guests (**photo 5**). On a different note, the security sector continues to provide a primary source of income among the Sinhala lower class, particularly in the interior of the Eastern Province. Many families have at least one child who works as a home guard (vigilante), police officer, or soldier (**photo 6**).

Photo 6. The typical sight of home guards and policemen walking down the main road in Tampalagamam





Photo 7. Fishing boat leaving the Koddiyar Bay.

The Trincomalee harbour has long been of strategic economic and military importance, though its significance has fluctuated over the centuries. The easing of the security situation marked a major change around the harbour. Fishermen were no longer hindered by Navy restrictions (**photo 7**), the beautiful islands in the Koddiyar Bay became a possible tourist potential (**photo 8**), a visiting Indian navy vessel

underlined Trinco's continued strategic importance (**photo 9**), the ramshackle ferry from Trinco town to Muthur was replaced by a larger and faster ship (**photo 10**), and it became common for families to hang out on Trinco's once quite desolate beaches (**photo 11**), even in the evenings. These and many other changes to do with territory and circulation are discussed in article 4.

Photo 8.
One of several picturesque islands in the Koddiyar Bay.



Photo 9.
A visiting Indian navy vessel leaving the harbour of Trincomalee.



Photo 10.
The new ferry from Trinco to Muthur



Photo 11. A family enjoying the beach in Trincomalee town.





Photo 12. Election rally in Trincomalee.

Sri Lanka's first post-war parliamentary elections took place in April 2010. As described in article 3, they brought along a whole sequence of events, rallies, pocket meetings and a general state of excitement.

Photo 12 shows the main rally of the government party, which took place in the cricket stadium in the heart of Trincomalee town on 21 March 2010. While then Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickrematunge – who had arrived with a helicopter – delivers a speech, the government candidates, religious leaders and other notables are seated on stage. Photos of President Mahinda Rajapaksa were prominently displayed on the stage. The rest of town was quiet and largely deserted, though a few latecomers still made their way to the stadium, typically wearing a blue cap displaying a Betel leaf, the icon of the government party (**photo 13**). On election day itself, people dressed up to go to the polling station and cast their vote. **Photo 14** displays voters approaching a school close to Muthur, which was converted to a polling station.



Photo 13. Spectators making their way to the rally.

Photo 14. Women and men turning up at their polling station in Seniyur, close to Muthur, formerly an LTTE controlled area.





Photo 15. Evangelical church, Alles Garden, Trincomalee.

After the war, eastern Sri Lanka underwent a remarkable proliferation of religious movements (see article 4). Alongside revivalist and reform projects, the symbolic territorial display through religious buildings was a salient feature of this transition. On this page, we see a Christian evangelical church along the main road in Alles Garden (Trincomalee town), which did regular services with lots of chanting and – at times – screaming, incurring the indignation of some the Hindu families living in the surroundings (**photo 15**), the massive complex of a newly built Hindu temple, in what used to be a deserted military borderland just north of Trincomalee town (**photo 16**), and the ramshackle building of the so-called Calvery church in Veeramanagar, a village that used to be in LTTE-controlled area (**photo 17**). It was only after the withdrawal of the LTTE that churches other than the mainline Catholic and Methodist church could enter these areas, but they needed only little time to attract large numbers of people (for discussion see article 4).



Photo 16. The new Krishna temple at 6th Mile Post, north of Trincomalee town.

Photo 17. Calvery church, Veeramanagar.





Photo 18. Families enjoying their trip to Lankapatuna.

Lankapatuna (**photo 18**), close to Verugal, used to be a deserted rock sticking out in the Ocean with an LTTE gun post on it. Today it is a popular Buddhist site for tourists and pilgrims – inspired by the narrative that it was here that Buddha’s tooth was brought to Sri Lanka. It is one among many sites that invokes a sense of triumph and celebration among some (mainly Sinhalese) and anxiety and anger among others (mainly the minorities). In Kalady, a few kilometers to the south, there is another rock with historic inscriptions on it. Sheltered by these ancient engravings, the LTTE used the rock as a radio post. The container that used to house a studio is now home to a Buddhist monk (**photo 19**) and the radio antenna is now the rather tall pedestal to a Buddha statue. Tamil and Muslim interpretations of these sacred sites often place them in a larger narrative of Sinhala domination, which also features irrigations schemes and Sinhala settlers. The family on **photo 20** – formerly landless, now migrated to the east – is illustrative of this narrative. The monk of the Seruwila temple had them settled along a new road (constructed by the army) to secure the area. For discussion, see article 4.

Photo 19. Buddhist monk at the entrance of his home cum container at Kalady.



Photo 20. A family of newly arrived settlers along the Somawathie Road





Photo 21. The walled compound of the Governor of the Northern Province, just outside of Trincomalee town.

As discussed in article 3, the end of the war heralded some significant changes for the civil service. While bureaucrats no longer had to fear threats from the LTTE, they did not think all these changes were positive. They expressed concern about political interference and their inability to counter-leverage the government agenda. **Photo 21** shows the compound of the Governor of the Northern Province, outside Trincomalee town. The

high walls, tight security and relatively inaccessible location were taken as symbols for the perceived government agenda of domination and militarization. The Governor was a former military commander. **Photo 22** shows the brand new Divisional Secretariat of Verugal. It was only after the LTTE lost control of this area that the civil service fully resumed its functions in this area.

Photo 22. The Divisional Secretariat of Verugal.



Chapter 4

Methodology and positionality

I used to call myself a disciplinary orphan. Although chapter 2 placed political geography at the centre of my conceptual framework, there is no academic discipline that I would unreservedly call my home. Looking back, I realise that image can be turned upside down. The sequence of different experiences in fact provides me with an extended network of kin and acquaintances. My PhD research draws not just from the fieldwork carried out as a geography student of the University of Zurich, it also builds on the work done in previous capacities and disciplines. Before discussing my actual methods, this chapter therefore starts out with a more autobiographical section. I discuss my prior experiences at some length as they provide relevant background to my positionality, particularly to the way I have grappled with questions around normative issues, political positioning, and policy relevance.

4.1. Departures

This dissertation argues against teleological and interventionist interpretations. Like many other scholarly writings, it is policy-critical. However, I step away from the often implicit, but common discourse among academics that diplomats and aid workers are disinterested, uninformed, and cynical. In my view, such pleas – which are at times reinforced with the disqualifying shorthand of “4-wheel drive”, “AC office”, “neo-liberalism” – amount to an academic deficit born from a failure to accept that policy realities are not fundamentally different from other socio-political phenomena. Based on my experience as a policy researcher, I have much more appreciation for work along the lines of Tania Li’s “Will to Improve” (2007) and David Mosse’s term “ethnography of aid” (2004). While the articles in this dissertation are too far removed from the aid industry to qualify for the latter term, I have done sufficient institutional boundary crossing and adaptation to appreciate the challenges of matching policy realities with ground-level complexities. I found most of my former interlocutors in ministries and NGOs

smart and committed, and the institutions in which they operated not altogether nonsensical. Yet, the structural contradictions of policy-research are clear: breadth often goes at the cost of depth, speed often goes at the cost of rigour, and policy-relevance often propels biased questions.

The journey that led to this dissertation started with six months of fieldwork in Trincomalee (and Jaffna) for a Master's thesis on conflict-related aid dilemmas (Klem 2001).⁷⁵ This research experience has fundamentally shaped my academic formation, and I have continued to follow some of the research sites in Trincomalee District⁷⁶, though often with long intervals. Enthused by the experience of interviewing and exploring, but dissatisfied with the long time frames and (often) small audience of academic research, I switched to freelance journalism.⁷⁷ This was more efficient, readability received much more attention, and the topic-relevance for the audience was always at front stage.

Having found out the hard way that research and journalism are not so easily combined⁷⁸, consultancy research seemed to be the middle ground, in terms of depth and rigour (less than academia, but more than journalism), but also with regard to time frames, deadlines and the audience-driven nature of the work. At the Conflict Research Unit of Clingendael, a foreign policy think-tank in an aristocratic land house at the outskirts of The Hague, I worked (2003-2005) on research projects for the Dutch or other Ministries of Foreign Affairs and aid agencies. Often operating as a sidekick of my boss Georg Frerks, I became familiar with the structures, interests and thinking patterns of a state bureaucracy, the world of departmental hierarchies and turf battles, policy papers, a flood of acronyms, and staff rotations. While some of our research was based on thorough contextual knowledge, there were also cases where budgets, changing priorities and deadlines led us to make-do with a week of "fieldwork" and one-page summaries of complex debates. It was very instructive to have

⁷⁵ This was part of the Master's Degree in Development Studies at the University of Nijmegen, the Netherlands (1998-2001).

⁷⁶ Mainly Nilaveli, Muthur, and Veeramanagar. The analyses of these three sites has fed into articles 3 and 4.

⁷⁷ Deterred by the prospect of more lonesome months at the computer, I enrolled for an eight-month degree in journalism (Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2002), ended up as an intern at the Dutch paper NRC Handelsblad and subsequently became a freelancer. The shift from six months of fieldwork to 24-hour news cycles was drastic, but pleasant. I enjoyed the opportunity to delve into a wide range of topics, write them up within a few days maximum and have them disseminated to some 200.000 people.

⁷⁸ When I had the chance in late 2002 to return to Sri Lanka to write a chapter in a book on NGOs in conflict zones (Klem 2006), I ventured to write a short newspaper article on the field situation now that the peace process was in full swing and the ceasefire in force. The contradictions between journalism and academic research with regard to ethical dilemmas, political issues and self-positioning were much bigger than I had imagined, for example on the issue of anonymity. I felt compromised about attributing quotes to people, but the editor insisted that sources should never be anonymised per standard procedure (as is common in the bulk of academic writing). To make matters worse, I got malaria, and I ended up sending my text away while struggling against feverish hallucinations. My text made it to print (NRC Handelsblad, 2 December 2002, page 6), but I felt the article was impaired by my failure to choose between the roles of journalism and academia.

access to diplomats, international organisations, activists, and the ability to visit a whole range of countries. These are luxuries that many academics do not have, but the challenge was obvious: how to inject the fascinating nuances and complexities of a place like Trincomalee into a Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which (when push comes to shove) serves to protect a Dutch minister, and where one person is responsible for massive budgets and large parts of the world? We often tried to debunk “The Hague’s bureaucratic realities” and we were given space to be critical, but there were also occasions where we used as a quick fix keeping the system in place.⁷⁹

The main focus of my work remained with Sri Lanka, where my colleagues and I were drawn into the donor circus around the peace process. Development donors had agreed to tie their aid to “progress in the peace process”⁸⁰, but this strategy had backfired. The peace process unravelled, but war did not resume. Donors were not sure what their role should be, but they could not ignore their own spending pressure. To anticipate possible future developments in an open-minded way, the so-called Donor Working Group commissioned a scenario-exercise, which we organised for them (Frerks et al. 2004). Both the donors and ourselves were struggling with what I’ve called the teleological trap (section 2.6). The whole point of the exercise was to work against this, and some of the scenarios we developed were pretty grim. Converting those insights into practical policies proved difficult, however. In the subsequent Strategic Conflict Assessment (Goodhand and Klem 2005), we reviewed the political structures and dynamics around the crumbling peace process, the flawed liberal peace dogma underlying the talks and the escalating violence. We continued to argue for constructive international engagement, but admittedly we were not so sure what that engagement could still entail, with both the LTTE and the government taking recalcitrant, confrontational positions. It proved very difficult to completely free ourselves from the war-to-peace trappings and its normative schemata and to be sensitive to the often contingent processes as they unfolded alongside the fledgling peace process.

Having been sent off with the next round of budget cuts at Clingendael, I set up my own research vehicle (Bart Klem Research) to continue doing very similar work (2005-present). This provided flexibility and independence, but the basic

⁷⁹ Sometimes, we were hired for merely symbolic reasons (e.g. the study was used to show that “something was done” on a particular theme, a fig leaf to not do anything), or on opportunistic grounds (budgets that need to be finished before the end of the fiscal year).

⁸⁰ In the so-called Tokyo Declaration of June 2003.

frustrations and dilemmas of policy-research remained. And they in fact became more pronounced with the post-tsunami rush. We did some self-funded fieldwork on this (Frerks and Klem 2005b and 2011), but tried to steer clear of the subsequent post-tsunami consultancy boom.⁸¹ When I encountered my third generation of staff at the Dutch embassy in Colombo, the limitations of consultancy research started to become an irritant. The deepening of my research interests was not matched by my clients, who (understandably) asked questions very similar to those of their predecessors.⁸²

The chance to participate in an inter-university study effort into faith-based organisations in eastern Sri Lanka enabled a move away from the rapid cycles and politics of policy research. Though I did not know this would later turn out to be the starting point for one of my PhD articles (article 1), the research itself marked a deliberate shift from the rushed 1-2 week trips to Afghanistan or Liberia to more thoughtful, time-consuming analysis, and intensive collaboration with Jonathan Goodhand, Shahul Hasbullah, Benedikt Korf (who would become my PhD supervisor), Tudor Silva, and Jonathan Spencer. I remember the latter saying we needed to “lie down and chew on this” after an interview at an organisation in Ampara (July 2007). In his view, our barrage of questions had bordered on interrogation. It had been easy-going by my standards. I had had much more head-on encounters with NGOs when I felt they provided overly rosy pictures of their work. And none of my research visits had involved much lying down to think. I started to question the need to rush through four interviews a day, and my attempt to adapt bore fruit: apart from new insights and ideas, it proved to be much more enjoyable! However, it has proven difficult to tame my impatience and adrenaline.

When Benedikt Korf convinced and helped me to start a PhD at the Political Geography section of the University of Zurich, I deliberately moved away from the policy world.⁸³ My modest network in the diplomatic community of Colombo

⁸¹ For a critical discussion see Korf (2010).

⁸² I voiced these frustrations publicly. Picking up on my journalistic sympathies and a genuine belief in transparency, I aired my thoughts to a journalist writing a critical page-size newspaper article about my previous employer Clingendael. I now realise that my criticism to the institute – “it is more a marketplace than a university”, “sometimes they google their research together” – was no less a reflection of my own work than it was of theirs. It did not help that most others closed the ranks, so that my quote ended up in the lead: “If someone has been to Kabul once, he’s pretty much an Afghanistan expert” (NRC Handelsblad, 5 February 2007, page 2; my translation). My former colleagues, some of whom furiously called me up, will have perceived me as a disgruntled employee taking revenge for a discontinued contract. This perception was understandable, but incorrect: I was trying to be honest, but in hindsight my sweeping statements accomplished nothing and damaged some relationships that were valuable to me.

⁸³ I in fact started on a rather ambitious footing, but ended up writing a much more focused PhD “just” about eastern Sri Lanka. My initial plan was to develop a fairly grant argument connecting Sri Lanka to other conflict areas (Nepal, Aceh, West Kalimantan) and separate the wheat from the chaff in our understanding of the triad armed conflict, the state, and liberal reforms.

started to erode, as I firmly placed the emphasis of my field stays in places like Akkaraipattu and Trincomalee. This was illuminating. I became more acutely aware of the limited role the aid industry plays in people's everyday life, and engaged with more localised political issues about which I had been ignorant. And it was liberating, to not have to worry about policy relevance, let alone implementable recommendations.

My positionality came full circle with the end of the war. In a way that none had really foreseen – and many analysts had considered impossible a few years earlier – the LTTE was defeated militarily. This generated strong emotions, also for a supposedly detached academic like me. Was the defeat of the LTTE a good thing? And what about the price at which its defeat had come: the massive onslaught of civilians, particularly in the final month of battle? The dramatic shift of May 2009 fundamentally upset received understandings, normative positions and engagement strategies with regard to Sri Lanka's conflict. As one of the few Dutch analysts of contemporary Sri Lanka, I was asked to comment by several media. I thus returned to an arena where nuances, constructions and complexities provide little refuge. And I felt powerless and ashamed, for not having cared more. For being pre-occupied with constructed realities, rather than speak out (however insignificant the effect would have been) when the net was closing around the several hundred thousand civilians, abused by the LTTE as a human shield, and ruthlessly sacrificed by the government, which gave a *carte blanche* to the military's heavy weapons.

After the war, I got the opportunity to revisit previous analyses of the conflict and the collapse of the peace process through the evaluation of Norway's peace efforts (early 1990s – 2009) in a team with Jonathan Goodhand and Gunnar Sørbo (Goodhand et al. 2011a). Reflective interviews with those directly involved in the peace talks and the ceasefire monitoring (SLMM) and with high-level officials in India and elsewhere were insightful. They were also an exercise in realism, in part because the evaluation itself became subject to higher-than-usual levels of evaluation politics and media scrutiny, with both significant Norwegian political interests staked in the process, and the Sri Lankan government not granting us visa. Under pressure from a UN panel report (UN Panel of Experts 2011) and the British Channel 4 documentary "Sri Lanka's Killing Fields", the Rajapaksa regime was well entrenched in its denial of war crimes and the refusal of political reforms to address the island's minority issue. Rumours about the regime's surveillance and questioning of academics, tapping of phones and email

became increasingly suggestive, and it was for the first time, that I got nervous about travelling on a tourist visa and self-censored some of my emails.

The nutshell autobiography above could easily be mistaken for an exercise in vanity, or at least as a sign of an inflated interest in personal accomplishments and mistakes. However, I believe the reflections above are analytically relevant. The experience of being a student-adventurer, deadline-driven journalist, suit-clad consultant, policy-critical PhD student and dissatisfied onlooker of the end of the war provides important background to this dissertation, both in terms of the methods and data I used (section 4.2 below), as well as the wider set of reflections underpinning them (biases, ethics, positionality; section 4.3).

4.2. Methods

The term that comes closest to a single label for the methodology used in this PhD thesis is the “extended case method”, coined by Michael Buroway (1998). This entails the application of “reflexive science to ethnography in order to extract the general from the unique, to move from the ‘micro’ to the ‘macro’, and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on preexisting theory.” (1998: 5) Such an empirical analysis is based on longer-term presence in the research field. It builds on interviews and observations and it aims to construct contextualised knowledge and meaning, or in Rose’s words, “situated knowledges” (1997). However, Buroway’s approach diverges from some of the earlier anthropological studies in the sense that it is not confined to one site, but rather explores 1) several sites spread over a region, over 2) a longer period of time. This brings to mind the popular term multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995), but as others (Hage 2005) have asked before me: how far can one expand the empirical focus over both time (longitudinal research over a decade) and space (connecting specific localities to a larger narrative), for the research to still qualify as ethnography? This expansion challenges received social science approaches. The empirical focus is too wide for common anthropological approaches like “deep hanging out” (I was covering a large area during relatively brief visits), but the research area is too variegated and often too unfamiliar to rely on more reductive approaches like surveys or desk study analysis. I thus ended up using a methodology that draws from different disciplines. It is qualitative, empirical and it covers several scales and sites (and it thus more superficial than ethnographies of “the everyday”, e.g. Gaasbeek 2010a; Walker 2010). Some of the underlying analytical choices about what matters or what is

most interesting were informed by media and policy instincts, but the study is more thorough and rigorous than journalism and consultancy research. My understanding of Sri Lanka's overall context and its political system reverberates with political science and political sociology approaches, but I have placed the corresponding research methods (key informant interviewing, gathering statistics and written sources) in dialogue with more fine-grained localised analysis.⁸⁴

More concretely, this thesis rests on the following methods: interviews, observations, and gathering documents and existing data.

Interviews. This was my main data-gathering method. I conducted interviews with a wide range of people of different backgrounds, ethnicity, religion, gender, origin, profession, status and so on. Without exception, these were flexible, unstructured interviews. I did not use a questionnaire or a written topic list. There was of course a common and deliberate thread in these interviews, but I let the conversation flow differently depending on what the respondent expressed. With very few exceptions, I took handwritten notes during the interview, which were later converted into typed notes. I never used an audio or video recorder, to keep my profile as low as possible, avoid additional concerns about confidentiality, and preserve an informal atmosphere. In addition to basic contents and specific quotes, I wrote down observations about body language, how people talked, the setting, interactions between respondents, things happening in the background, and I paid particular attention to what people had strong emotions about: things they thought were funny, scary, taboo, shameful, politically sensitive and so on. In some cases, I conducted interviews together with one or more colleagues. This overall style applies not just to my PhD research, but to fieldwork done in other capacities as well. The following clusters of interviews can be distinguished.

Firstly, interviews with people in their private capacity. These were informal interviews in the sense that they took place in people's homes or in public spaces and were very conversational. Of course, many respondents may have experienced the interview as quite formal. After all, it is not that common for a foreigner to show up at your doorstep. In most cases, I needed to explain who I was and what I came to do (the field level version of informed consent, to which I return below). As a result, these encounters were informal *interviews*, rather than

⁸⁴ This approach is obviously quite different from the quantitative work of political scientists and political geographers, who have recently started to take the local variety of armed conflict more seriously (Kalyvas 2006; Kalyvas et al. 2008; O'Loughlin et al. 2010; Raleigh et al. 2010; Weinstein 2007).

casual chats. Most of these interviews took place in Tamil or Sinhala, with translation by somebody I had hired to help me out. Particularly with less well-to-do people like fishermen, agricultural labourers, people living in villages or refugee camps, I had to rely on translation. In other cases – e.g. shop-owners, public sector employees, school principals – we could talk in English. In many cases, I interviewed people more than once, sometimes five or six times over a period of several years. I used the phrase “private capacity” above, because these interviews were essentially about the respondents’ own lives, their circumstances, opportunities, worries and ideas. During my Master’s degree, I conducted such interviews whilst staying inside the community: I slept in Nilaveli Welfare Centre and the village Veeramanagar for a few days at the time. All of the later interviews took place during day-time or evening visits. I would sleep and work (make notes, phone calls) in a guesthouse in one of the regional hubs: Trincomalee, and Akkaraipattu, and to a lesser extent Muthur and Batticaloa.

A second cluster of interviews concerns officials in eastern Sri Lanka, such as bureaucrats, politicians, religious leaders, the military, and NGOs. These interviews were conducted in English and tended to take place in people’s offices. They were usually conversational and unstructured like the other interviews, but because these were educated, English-speaking people, the speed was higher and the style more to-the-point. I met these respondents in their professional capacity, so they were sometimes a bit more pressed for time and often had a repertoire with clear ideas of what they should or should not tell me. The substantive focus was not primarily on their own lives, but on the subject area they were responsible for. Typically, they felt the legitimate thing to provide was “information”, that is, figures, facts or documents. Challengingly, my interest often lay with more sensitive political topics: issues one could not openly ask about, certainly not before building some rapport. I thus ended up asking a lot of factual questions about supposedly neutral topics, like “development”, while trying to read between the lines and gradually move the conversation to “how things really work”, to the issues “people are actually worried about”. My article on the civil service (article 3), for example builds on a long sequence of interviews that started in bureaucratic lingo (institutional structures, classes, procedures, competent authorities), but after I expressed my admiration for the fact that the civil service managed to sustain itself under conditions of war and LTTE intimidation, the officers would start sharing anecdotes about these difficulties and their ways of grappling with it.

A third cluster of interviews was conducted with people in elite positions, such as high level officials in Colombo, powerful politicians, academics, activists, diplomats and expatriate staff of international agencies. Most of these people knew relatively little about Sri Lanka's east coast, but their knowledge was vital to understand Sri Lankan politics at large, the role of particular agencies or international involvement. I did some of these interviews during my PhD, but most of them took place through consultancy research, either prior or in parallel to my PhD. These projects provided me with access to ambassadors, directors of international agencies, ministers, party leaders, top-level bureaucrats and former president Kumaratunga, many of whom I would probably not have been able to get access to as a PhD student. With some people in Colombo's academic circles (as well as activists and NGOs), I developed a more reciprocal relationship. This dissertation benefits from joint research and discussion with these people. The interviews with officials, on the other hand, were often very formal. Some were conducted on the phone or skype, but most took place in an office or official residence. Apart from the ambience (polished shoes rather than flip flops and – at times – whiskey rather than milk tea), the substance and style of the interviews was quite different. When interviewing farmers and fishermen, my main concern was to "lower the bar" (e.g. through easy questions, appreciative listening), but in these formalised settings, often the main worry was to not be taken for a ride. This required showing respondents I was familiar with the context and politely challenging romanticised, politically opportune or revisionist perspectives.

Observations. The combination of interviews and observations is important, for fairly straightforward reasons. Observations alone tell us very little about what the observed means for the people at stake. Interviews alone tend to privilege discursive realities; they often propagate what people think life should be like or what they think the interviewer needs to know, and thus downplay issues that are shameful, sensitive, political, or deemed irrelevant. The interplay between observations and interviews is therefore central to deepening our understanding of the places we study. It adds meaning, it helps generate new questions, and it challenges people's representations. Observation is a bit of an opaque term, however, in terms of what it actually means in practice other than sightseeing. To some extent it comes without trying, but memory can be treacherous, and I have become aware that I did not record the observations of my first visits to Sri Lanka thoroughly enough. In recent years, I made more conscious efforts to note down everyday observations and elaborated on them while typing notes.

In addition to these casual observations, it gradually became clear to me that I should also deliberately visit certain places to make more systematic observations. Many phenomena only occur in specific times and places. For the article on the post-war elections (article 2) for example, it was vital to trace the theatrical manifestations of election fever: the rallies, speeches, “pocket meetings”, the posters, the billboards, and so on. Observing that there were political posters was obviously not enough: which candidates were pasted where and when? How many people turned up at which rallies, how did they look, where were they from? I started to take more systematic notes on these issues. I also made a deliberate effort to observe change. Particularly in the post-war period (my field visits in 2010 and 2011), there were rapid shifts in many walks of life. Ferries were replaced by bridges (see the pictures on page 87), new roads split the jungle in two, refugee camps were closed, new houses emerged, checkpoints and army camps disappeared (see article 4 mainly). A public evening life was resuscitated in the region (see for example picture 11 on page 89). Curfews were lifted, supermarkets with evening hours opened, religious festivals and parades took place after sunset. And all too often I made observations that made me wonder: is this new, or did I just not notice before? Detailed notes, photographs and sketch maps helped, but some omissions proved hard to remedy.

Documents and existing data. This data gathering method did not play a central role in my research, partly because statistics and official documents were not available, incomplete, and difficult to get,⁸⁵ and partly because the available data were not so relevant to my substantive focus. Some basic data were obviously relevant and available, however. These included census figures, maps, demographic changes, and population statistics about employment, migration, displacement, poverty and so on. The article on elections (article 2) involved a historic review of election results in Trincomalee District (executed by Ajiwa Deen), and a ward-by-ward review of the results of the 2010 parliamentary elections in the research area. In addition, I gathered electoral lists, ballot cards, and propaganda flyers, and closely followed the (English language) newspapers. The article on the civil service (article 3) involved reviewing government documents and statistics on civil service employment. For the fourth article, on Trincomalee’s post-war political geography, I closely studied the sequence of government planning documents around the end of the war, these were

⁸⁵ To give a basic example, figures about the membership of a religious organisation like Tabligh Jamaat (which I would have used for article 1), were not available.

interesting partly as an indication of what may happen next, but more importantly as an insight into government thinking.

Qualitative interviews and observations are not a numbers game, but to give the reader some idea of the volume of work on which this PhD is based, table 4A provides a rough summary of the fieldwork.

Table 4A: Data collection during main field research

	Duration	Main place	# of interviews	Typed notes (# of words)	Used for article
Fieldwork 2007a	9 days	Ampara District	12	2.000	
Fieldwork 2007b	2 weeks	Akkaraipattu	38	40.000	1
Fieldwork 2008a	2 weeks	Akkaraipattu	33	25.000	1
Fieldwork 2008b	2 weeks	Akkaraipattu	37	29.000	1
Fieldwork 2010	3 months	Trincomalee	141	162.000	2, 3 and 4
Fieldwork 2011	2 weeks	Trincomalee	30	35.000	4
Accumulative	6 months		291	312.000	

Table 4B: Supportive body of data

Assignment	Client/affiliation	Main focus	Year	Field time	Output	Use in PhD:
MA fieldwork	University of Nijmegen	Trincomalee and Jaffna	2000-2001	6 months	Klem (2001)	- War-time bureaucracy (used for article 2) - Wartime situation in Veeramanagar and Nilaveli (art. 4)
Sharing Studies	Dutch embassy and University Grants Commission	Island-wide	2003-2005	None (workshops)	Frerks and Klem (2005a)	- Academia in Sri Lanka (incl. north and east) - Political interpretations of conflict - Muslim perspective (art. 1)
Strategic Conflict Assessment	Several donors	Island-wide and east coast	2004-2005	1 month	Goodhand and Klem (2005)	Island-wide war/post-war transition: - East coast: No-war-no peace and post-tsunami - Sri Lankan politics (art. 2) - Peace process - International involvement
Post-tsunami	Clingendael	South- and east coast	2005	3 weeks	Frerks and Klem (2005b and 2011)	Immediate post-tsunami situation
Evaluation peace projects	Dutch embassy and Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies	South coast and Upcountry	2005-2006	1 month	Frerks, De Mel and Klem (2006)	Local perceptions of conflict and peace process
Evaluation Norwegian peace efforts	NORAD	Norway, India, EU countries, Sri Lanka (SL on the phone)	2010-2011	2 months	Goodhand et al. (2011a)	Island-wide war/post-war transition: - Sri Lankan politics (art. 2) - Peace process - International involvement

As discussed in section 4.1, there were a number of prior and parallel research encounters that fed into this dissertation. Not all parts of these were directly relevant, but for accountability's sake, I have listed the activities that involved significant exposure to Sri Lankan realities. These efforts were not originally intended to become part of a PhD, but table 4B shows there has been a periodic engagement with Sri Lanka, with at least one research visit every year in the period 2000 to 2011, with two remarkable – but coincidental – exceptions: 2002 (the year the ceasefire agreement was signed) and 2009 (the year the LTTE was defeated).

4.3. Methodological challenges

While the above descriptions and overviews give some indication of empirical evidence gathered, they tell us little about the validity and reliability of these data and the dilemmas involved in gathering them. The following paragraph discusses in more detail how I have dealt with key methodological challenges – operationalisation, biases, positionality, and ethical issues. Insightful articles have been written to debunk some of the pretence emanating from methodological terminology, often under provocative titles like: "The ten lies of ethnography" (Fine 1993), "Are case studies more than sophisticated storytelling?" (Diefenbach 2009), and "A not so multi-sited ethnography of a not so imagined community" (Hage 2005). The articles that form the core of my PhD engage with such reflections only very briefly.⁸⁶ Fortunately, the present text provides scope for a more thorough discussion.

Fieldwork and war

The methodological issues of my research are far from unique. The conventional dilemmas of qualitative fieldwork rear their head. What is specific about the kind of fieldwork carried out is the context of (and focus on) armed conflict. This adds a layer of challenges. Several authors have discussed these challenges before me (Daniel 1996; Finnström 2001; Gould 2010; Hoffmann 2003; Kovats-Bernat 2002; Nordstrom 2004; Nordstrom and Robben 1995; Peritore 1990; Richards 2005; Scheper-Hughes 1995; Smith and Robinson 2001). In brief, my position is that there is nothing altogether exceptional about field research in the context of

⁸⁶ To preserve space for empirical richness and substantive discussion, but also because I feared that an overly self-critical discussion on methodology would lead to self-inflicted damage in the peer review process. I hasten to add that the methodological notes in articles were not misleading or inaccurate, but to let sleeping dogs lie, I refrained from conjuring up complicated fundamental questions, which I would not be able to address satisfactorily in just a few lines.

war, but that many of the normal challenges of social science become more acute and problematic. There is little that is fundamentally different about biases, lack of access, confidentiality, and unreliable data, but they are plausibly more pronounced in a region where the government only controls part of the territory and where people have grounded fears for being arrested or shot.

I try to steer away from the sensationalism that research in war-affected areas may bring along. There is a risk of portraying violence as spectacular and fieldworkers as heroic, and though this may not be altogether ungrounded, I believe such an angle is unhelpful in coming to grips with the challenges at stake. Unlike the suggestion of Nordstrom and Robben's title "fieldwork under fire" (1995), the risk of getting shot was not a big part of the equation for me. In fact, many of the dilemmas I encountered pivoted on the fact that I was much less likely to be fired at than the people I interviewed or employed. Though there are more dangerous contexts than the Sri Lankan one, I believe this observation has broader resonance. I did not get faced with many violent threats during my research, but one of the more dangerous incidents corroborates the above point. I was doing interviews in LTTE territory in early 2001 when an unknown man on a bicycle passed me a handwritten note, reading nothing but: "Bart Klem, please come to Muthur immediately". Not long after I crossed the frontline to reach the government-controlled town Muthur, I heard and saw the air force launch their bombs at the area I had just left. On return the next day, I faced the craters and the people who had neither the luxury of a prior warning, nor the ability to just leave. They knew that; I knew that. They told me what happened; I did not know what to tell them. I admit it felt sensational and surreal to have escaped an air raid. But on second thought, the strongest feelings concerned the problems (and non-heroism) around my positionality and the realisation that it is not only the violence per se that matters (the graphic videos of bomb explosions that TV stations provide us with), but the continued sense of threat that it musters; invisible, but very prevalent. Like my respondents, I started looking up when I heard a plane come over and I did not forget the physical experience of compression and flexing one feels when heavy explosions occur in the distance.

The reader will find very little explicit violence in this PhD thesis. This is partly a reflection of the time and place of my fieldwork. With the exception of 2006 and 2007, the main military confrontations did not take place in the east, and much of my fieldwork was conducted when open combat had subsided. To some extent, this is a limitation. Most of my research subjects had direct or indirect encounters

with violence. Not having been present when they ran from their houses, when they were forcibly recruited, arrested (and sometimes tortured), and when mines and artillery exploded, conceals crucial parts of their lives. In part this weakness results from coincidence (some things simply happened not to take place while I was present) and the timing and regional focus of my research (which were driven by other concerns). But it is also a reflection of a deliberate choice. The limited experience I had with interviewing people who were directly exposed to violence showed me that this was often not the best way of understanding the conditions of war. Interviewing people who burst out in tears raised ethical questions and resulted in very uncomfortable situations. Moreover, they often did not result in all that much new insight. In addition, deliberately entering areas where offensives were ongoing would have come with lots of pragmatic difficulties – permits, checkpoints, no facilities – and would have raised concerns about my own safety.

Apart from these concerns, I felt it was analytically productive to take more distance from the battlefield. Much in line with Stephen Lubkemann's work on Mozambique (2008), my research takes issue with the idea that violence needs to be at the heart of our understanding of war and post-war conditions. Lubkemann argues, "violence should not be treated a priori as the sole or sometimes even primary force that shapes war-time living [...]" (2008: 36). Rather than foregrounding violence, this PhD ventures to explore other dimensions of life during war and post-war transition. The functioning of the civil service (article 3), political identity struggles around elections (article 2) or the role of religious organisations in a society that perceives itself as under siege (article 1) are less dramatic manifestations of war-time life than violence itself, but they are no less indicative of the conditions that prevailed in eastern Sri Lanka. Obviously, I do not mean to trivialise violence, or deny its importance in shaping people's lives. But I find the suggestion that violence itself is the best vantage point for understanding war-time and post-war conditions misconstrued.

To a large extent research in the context of war should thus not diverge from other social science endeavours. People living in war are no aliens and there is no reason to suspend the insights and methodologies that we use in other contexts. However, it is not "business as usual" either, because some of the sensitivities, dangers and limitations are graver than in most other contexts. Research on war-time conditions tends to be more explorative, because even the most basic information like how many people live where or which areas are accessible is

often absent or subject to rapid change. It tends to be more political, because there are fiercely entrenched positions about what is going on, how that came to be, and who is right or wrong, friend or foe. It tends to generate quite acute ethical questions about possible negative implications of fieldwork and possible responsibilities attached to analysis. None of these issues are entirely unique. Research on societies undergoing war is thus not altogether special, but its challenges and limitations tend to be worse than elsewhere. The following paragraphs discuss these challenges and limitations in more detail.

Demarcating a subject

The research presented here was not the result of a coherent plan, outlining four articles with a pre-defined focus. Rather, it emerged from a highly adaptive (and thus quite messy) process. Each article built on the previous one, but also shifted the substantive focus quite a bit, thus forcing me to enter into diverse conceptual arenas and academic debates. Moreover, the region I was studying was constantly in flux. When my PhD started, the war was in full swing and nobody expected it to end any time soon. When I arrived for my last field visit, the defeat of LTTE was already over two years ago and there were many unforeseeable post-war developments. Adjusting to these changes was a central part of my dissertation research.

In brief, the field research for each of my articles encompassed a cadence of two phases: exploration and consolidation. The first was open-minded – even somewhat desultory – and aimed to identify prevalent themes, salient anxieties, and surprising observations in an attempt to formulate interesting questions and puzzles. The actual research questions that shaped my articles only emerged while I was a few days or weeks into the fieldwork. This was most obvious in the article on the elections (article 2), which I more or less bumped into, but applies to the other ones as well. Though I knew the elections had been scheduled, it was only when I encountered the speculations, pre-election manoeuvres, and the theatrical display of posters and rallies that I was drawn to the socio-political importance of elections (see also section 2.3 and chapter 5). But how does one study elections? Where do you look? If the political work of elections is not confined to the voting booths on election day, but rather involves a whole sequence of phases that stitch together many different levels and sites, how can the research subject still be demarcated? I realised that elections mattered a lot more – in terms of the gravity people attach to it and the anxieties they have

about it – than any particular site or level could explain. Article 2 argues that the very significance of the phenomenon lies in the fact that it compresses different layers of politics and thus forces people to show their colours in grappling with their national identity (dignified citizens), loyalties to political parties and ethnic groups, the need to align with candidates from their locality and personal ties with politically active friends and relations. How do you capture that complexity when simply selecting one level or site is obviously not the solution? As was often the case during my research, time was already running when the fundamental nature of this question became clear to me. The elections were two-and-a-half months away, but the rumour circuit and the reshuffling of political alignments were already in full swing.

The second leg of my fieldwork cadence was about connecting an open-minded question to specific sites, people, and events. Each of my articles draws from several locations and explores a puzzle that connects them to broader trends and contentious issues. Rather than exhaustively describing one specific topic or site, my research tends to seek contradictions and paradoxes between such topics and sites. This forces me to make trade-offs: sacrificing some of the empirical depth to open up space for analysing developments that transcend the specificities of any particular village, community, or event. These trade-offs have been subject to debate, particularly among anthropologists. Marcus' seminal article on "the emergence of multi-sited ethnography" (1995) helped precipitate this debate. The move from a classical single-site study to studies of multiple sites opens up promising and pertinent fields of anthropological study, but it also generates methodological anxieties about the "limits of ethnography" (Marcus 1995: 99), "attenuating the power of fieldwork" (100-101), and losing the "subaltern perspective" (101-102).⁸⁷ Clifford Geertz – in a later critique of James Clifford – phrased these concerns in more critical and derogatory terms. Accusing Clifford of "hit-and-run ethnography" (1998: note 3), "drifting, freestyle anthropology" (72), which results in a "thoroughly ephemeral" analysis (72), Geertz casts strong, critical concerns about the limits and limitations of multi-sited ethnography. In an interesting review on this debate, Wogan (2004) describes anthropology's search for the middle ground: sufficiently in-depth to be empirically robust and rich in narrative, but broad and mobile enough to take on issues and phenomenon that reach beyond any given locality. Paul Richards (2011) has recently further

⁸⁷ In responding to these challenges, Marcus (1995) defines six different "tracking strategies". Rather than seeing the world pass by in one particular site, the researcher actively follows a lead, which brings her to different sites. More specifically, he suggests, we "follow the people", the "thing", the "metaphor", the "plot" (or story or allegory), the "life" (biography), or the "conflict". In addition, he suggest a somewhat hybrid strategy of a single-sited ethnography that is strategically situated and thus consciously serves as a case study within a broader research field. While I am much in favour of searching such middle grounds, it is less helpful in clarifying the term multi-sited ethnography.

developed these ideas in relation to researching war, an approach he has labelled: "causal process tracing".

I only learnt about these suggestions after concluding most of my fieldwork, but my methodology resonates closely with the idea elaborated by these authors. In the case of the article on elections mentioned above this amounted to the following steps. Firstly, I decided to focus on the Muslim community. Positioned between the Sinhala majority (and its nationalist ideology) and the Tamil minority (and its separatist ideology), the dynamic of juggling loyalties was most salient for the Muslims. They were torn between the need to be in government – "opposition is pointless" – and a fierce distaste and anxiety about Sinhala majoritarianism.⁸⁸ Secondly, I decided to look at several Muslim towns: Kinniya (the biggest one, which represented sufficient voters to secure a seat in parliament) and Muthur, Kuchchavelli, Pulmoddai, and Tophur (which were smaller and thus had to align themselves with other constituencies to stand a chance). My main focus lay with Kinniya and Muthur, partly because of my familiarity with the area and partly because the rivalry between these two localities was particularly pronounced. I interviewed people who were considered politically knowledgeable: organisers, schoolteachers, community and religious leaders, bureaucrats. In addition, I used my interviews with less educated people, most of which were conducted for other research interests, to insert questions about their views and expectations about the elections. Often, this occurred as a casual chat about what was quite obviously on people's mind, much like one would talk about an important sport match or a sudden change in the weather. Finally, I tried to interview the main protagonists: the Muslim candidates, though some of them were difficult to access.

I thus attempted to combine an open-minded research interest – covering a wide spectrum of issues – with a deliberate attempt to understand specific events, places and perspectives that seemed particularly relevant within that broader spectrum. I did not provide a detailed analysis of any particular town, political family or party, but rather tried to place strategically chosen people, events and locations in productive dialogue with each other. Similar strategies applied to my other articles.⁸⁹ The above approach harbours a level of opportunism. The

⁸⁸ In comparison, the Tamils and Sinhalese were more united in Trincomalee District. The former voted more or less *en bloc* for the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the vast majority of the Sinhalese voted for the government.

⁸⁹ Article 1 explores Muslim identity issues by connecting politics and religion in different sites around Akkaraipattu. It is based on interviews with the main religious groupings in Akkaraipattu and an exploration of the issues and places they mentioned as most important in terms of defining themselves in relation (or contradiction) to each other. For the analysis of how the civil service changed in the transition from war to post-war (article 3), I picked two administrative divisions (DS divisions), which were relevant in terms of ethnic demography (mixed) and military

researcher may be more inclined to select familiar locations and informants, and there is a risk that strategically chosen subjects of investigation shrug inconvenient data and merely confirm initial impressions. In an attempt to counter that risk, I deliberately tried to question and challenge my initial impressions.⁹⁰ I searched for the counter-view by interviewing people who were likely to have different opinions. Whilst writing reflective field notes, I underlined gaps and contradictions in my material. And I continued to approach a diversity of people for interviews. In addition to “snowballing”, I sought contact with people from different ethnic, religious, professional and other backgrounds. I questioned so-called “saturation points” and tried to denaturalise common assumptions.

Biases and access

Biases are like a hangover. It can't be avoided, but it's not as bad when you see it coming and try to mitigate it. Researchers are at risk of adopting scripted realities and politically correct representations, bereft of taboos, controversies and political sensitivities. They may remain outsiders with no access to backstage realities, or proponents of particular perspectives and politicised discourse. It is hard not to be aware of this challenge in a war-torn area. In a place like eastern Sri Lanka, it does not take much ethnographic instinct to sense that people have radically different interpretations of the region – its history, its main problems, its culprits – and some of the most important issues are not easily discussed in public. It was not advisable for me to go around and tell people I was doing research on the war, people's connections to the LTTE, political dynamics, and ethnic enmity. I often introduced myself as someone working on “development” and “geography”, who was interested in “the problems people are facing”. Only after developing some rapport, was I able to gradually delve into more sensitive issues. People often discussed them in cryptic ways. They would talk about “this man”, “those fellows” or “that side” to refer to the president, the LTTE, or LTTE controlled areas. People were very adept at “knowing what not to know.”⁹¹

Similarly, I faced difficulties of access. Parts of the region were military zones, which were off-limits to civilians. Key protagonists were sometimes inaccessible. LTTE leaders were increasingly difficult to approach (or dead) as my research

control (partly LTTE controlled during the war), and traced the main bureaucrats from the early 1990s until the present. For the article on Trincomalee's post-war political geography (article 4) I selected three sites that proved particularly controversial, each of which represented a bigger political issue: Lankapatuna (contested religious heritage), Veeramanagar (militarised zones), and Nilaveli (tourism).

⁹⁰ An approach that Strauss and Corbin (1990) have called the “flip flop technique”.

⁹¹ A phrase coined by Patricia Lawrence (quoted in Gaasbeek 2010a: 27).

progressed, and the government military became more and more suspicious of foreigners. For example, when I started my Master's research in 2000, it was helpful to be affiliated with an NGO. It guaranteed smooth passing through checkpoints and a legitimate ground to talk to military commanders and civil affairs officers. From 2005 and 2006 onwards, the tide turned and NGOs became a swearword. When I entered the police station in Akkaraipattu for an interview, I almost got thrown out. With barely concealed contempt, the ranking officer asked me: "How dare you come talk to us!?" Rumours started spreading of academics, who were screened, interrogated and had their laptops searched. When military or police officers asked whether I was with an NGO, I now answered with a vehement: "No, no, no, I'm a university student." More conventional issues of access, to do with travel time (getting to remote places) and gender (what issues can a male researcher discuss with which women?) of course played a role as well. I am a man, a white European, I am wealthy and well-educated by rural Sri Lankan standards, and people may easily perceive me as someone with connections to aid agencies, not matter how much I emphasized that my research did not serve such purposes. All this has implications: what I got to see, what I got to ask, whom I got to talk to, and what answers I was given. Language was another major barrier. I speak no Sinhala and my Tamil is useless beyond basic expressions of politeness, self-introduction. It only barely suffices for interacting with taxi-drivers and shop-owners. As a result, I had relatively easy access to the middle class of schoolteachers, senior bureaucrats, politicians, Catholic priests, and members of the elite. About half my interviews, however, were with people who did not speak conversational English. I usually managed to find good translators for Tamil and Sinhala, but the limitations and filters of translation obviously diluted the richness of my findings.

The basic strategy in countering these biases was to make sure I talked to a diversity of people (ethnic background, gender, location, class, and so on), to interview people several times (e.g. at different occasions and in different places) and to triangulate findings with other interviews or observations. While typing up notes, I made explicit reference to these issues and asked myself how other perspectives could be found. This often involved going against the current. During a first visit to a village, there were obviously people who were supposed to talk to a foreigner and people who were not. I thus tried to stay around for longer, come back several times, and deliberately interacted with people who were poor (judged by their clothing or the state of their house or hut) or marginalised (e.g. at the periphery of the village, home at times of work). Critical reflection was also

helped by the fact that I did not do my fieldwork in one long stretch. Taking some distance helped interrogate my own data, and I benefited a lot from interactions with colleagues who knew the area well, or were doing similar research elsewhere. They identified questions, gaps and biases that I had not thought of and provided critical feedback on tentative findings and analyses. These would strengthen the next field visit.

Research ethics

Field research is confronted with several ethics-related issues, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and adverse or culturally inappropriate effects of field research. These questions are far from new, but continue to receive much attention (e.g. Coy 2001; Fine 1993; Han 2010; Rose 1997; Smith 2006; Thiem and Robertson 2010). The key challenge in this debate, at least for me, is to translate elevated principles into a personalised, everyday kind of ethics that makes sense in the context at stake. A term like informed consent for example – the “holy grail” of research ethics as Fine (1993) provocatively calls it – obviously touches on a crucial issue, but without contextual adaptation, it may be completely impractical⁹² or cynical (i.e. merely soothe researchers’ angst and serve to satisfy the bureaucratic requirements of their financiers). Hardly any of my respondents would have been comfortable signing a form to participate in an interview. I always got some form of verbal consent, but whether this was *informed* consent is hard to say. Few of them had ever set foot in a university, some were illiterate, and hardly any had ever been abroad. How were they supposed to oversee the consequences of my research? When it came to the local ramifications of participating in an interview, they obviously knew much better than I did what the potential risks and benefits were. They lived in a world saturated with gossip, political violence, and a militarised state. Explicit moral accordance on the basis of a careful weighing of potential consequences was not part of their conversational routine, and I saw no way but to adapt to that. In other words, I tried as best as I could to explain who I was, asked whether we could talk and knowing they would not easily say no, I tried to look for signs of discomfort.

The problem with an overly contextualised notion of informed consent, however, is that the whole point of research is to take findings beyond their context. That

⁹² At one graduate school seminar I attended, I was instructed never to take a picture of anyone without the explicit permission of everyone on it. Unsurprisingly, the same powerpoint presentation was littered with snapshots taken from a driving vehicle, of a busy market, or of people passing on a bicycle.

brings us to the second key issue: confidentiality and the protection of sources. The obvious challenge here is that the point of an ethnographic study often lies in showing nuances and contextual detail, but for reasons of privacy and insecurity that is precisely what we may need to obscure. Journalists and consultants tend to be much more reticent in providing anonymity. Newspapers quote people with their full name unless there are very strong reasons not to. Consultant reports typically include an annex with all the people interviewed. In academic writing, the opposite is true. People are anonymised unless there are strong reasons not to. When we interviewed former Sri Lankan president Kumaratunga, she was somewhat offended we did not bring an audio recorder and she insisted we mentioned her full name when quoting her: "don't write, somebody said." In principle, I applied this rule to all politicians I interviewed. Similarly, I saw no need to make senior bureaucrats or community leaders untraceable when they voiced formal positions and said things they would normally say in public. Whenever they stepped out of line, when they exposed themselves or when they were under threat, I used the interviews anonymously only. In some cases, that implied having to obfuscate other details (e.g. time, place, their position). When it came to people who met me outside their professional capacity – elite, as well as lower class villagers – leaving out their name was my standard practice.

The final set of issues discussed here concerns the type of relationship one builds with respondents. Much has been said about the trade-off between closeness and detachment (Han 2010; Maier and Monahan 2010). I did not build the close relations and intimate friendship that have emerged out of other ethnographic work, in part because my research was spread out over several areas. Yet, in a smaller way, every interview or visit is about establishing rapport and human interactions, rather than just gathering information. Apart from the expectable obstacles of cultural adaptation, there were challenges about what people expected from me. It was not difficult to explain respondents that my visit would not be followed up with new wells, livestock, and tile roofing, but they also knew full well that a small help for them would not really dent my Swiss salary. At the University of Nijmegen, where I learnt to do field research, the received wisdom warned against this. The role of benefactor is at loggerheads with the aspiration of being like a fly on the wall. But I found it difficult to apply a hard and fast rule. When in doubt I tended to think back to one of my first fieldwork experiences. In 2001, I was conducting interviews with people who were returning to Kaithadi, a village east of Jaffna, which had just been re-conquered from the LTTE. Long distance shelling was still going on over our heads and the unexploded grenades

were lying in the gardens. The houses were in ruins, there were no facilities and the paddy fields were not accessible. A family sitting amidst their collapsed house told me why they had nevertheless returned. Staying in a camp was worse, they were fed up with living in the home of their equally desperate in-laws, and they wanted to protect from plunderers the little that remained of their home. At the end of the interview, they indicated they could really use some help. I politely declined, thinking that handing out money would create all kinds of negative side-effects on the way respondents would position themselves. I told myself, it made more sense for aid organisations to help in a systematic way, rather than individuals like me handing out cash on the basis of coincidence and personal emotions. I had it all figured out. But then my translator, Mr. Thuraisingham, stepped in and gave them the equivalent of what I paid him per day. He himself had a house in Jaffna, but was obviously not living in luxury. "Actually, these people really need help," he told me. I was stunned. And ashamed. And desperate for an opportunity to show him (and myself) that I was not an egoist. I have remained hesitant give money to respondents, but I have made exceptions on the basis of spur-of-the-moment decisions. It is not fundamentally different from the way I relate to the homeless man at the entrance of my supermarket in Amsterdam: sometimes I give him something or talk with him, sometimes I don't. Grand moral logics only take you so far.

Research impact and (policy) implications

In addition to the moral dilemmas of fieldwork, research ethics concerns the potential effects and political use of research findings. To use Nancy Scheper-Hughes' (1995) words, we are not only "spectators", but also "witnesses". Some of my respondents had strong expectations about my research. A senior Muslim community leader in Kinniya introduced me to a whole range of bureaucrats and politicians, saying I was a "good friend", with "a good knowledge of the east, especially the Muslims" and as someone "who has a good voice for the Muslims in the international community". Others were more anxious. One of my Sinhala translators asked me, while I was sitting on the back of his motorcycle on our very last trip: "will your book be something like the Channel 4 video?" The undertone was very clear: if so, he foresaw a lot of trouble. The British TV channel had aired a documentary earlier that year with horrific images of the end of the war; it amounted to an audio-visual indictment of the government for war crimes. On instigation of the government media, many Sinhalese (including my translator) believed the footage had been tampered with and channel 4 became a

codeword for the way Western countries were biased to the LTTE and continued to undermine Sri Lankan sovereignty. Both the expectation of my Muslim interlocutor and the anxiety of my Sinhala translator revealed inflated expectations about what my research could achieve, but the underlying questions were legitimate. It is tempting to pretend to be a neutral researcher and treat all viewpoints as equally interesting discursive perspectives, but at some point people call your bluff and ask: where do you stand?

In some cases, I was economic with the truth (or lied) in response to that question. When the personal security detail of a powerful politician summoned me for interrogation in the midst of an election rally, I intuitively played dumb. I did not expect much space for political nuances and open-mindedness, encircled by three rather massive men with sunglasses and *curricula vitae* that included the French Foreign Legion and senior police posts. Meanwhile the Prime Minister's (Sinhala) speech was gaining vigour and the two words I could decipher were "America" and "Europe". By the sound of it, he was not extolling cordial diplomatic ties and I became quite uncomfortable with the fact that my visiting girlfriend and I were the only white people in the cricket stadium cum rally ground (for an illustration of the setting, see the photo 12 on page 90). This was a pretty clear case, but in the early years of my research, my inclination to give vague answers was much more generic, even to well-intentioned respondents. I avoided outspoken positions and when they asked about the possible impact, I was a little disingenuous in telling them aid agencies may read my writing and may address their problems. This was technically true, but not all that likely, and I must admit that I experienced these questions like another hurdle to be taken, much like the questioning at a checkpoint.

In recent years, I have become more upfront. When respondents ask me what they may gain from my research, I usually tell them to expect very little. Although some may be disappointed, I have found that most people appreciate the frankness. Even without the prospect of concrete benefits, most of them seemed very willing to tell a genuinely interested outsider about their lives, their views and their worries. Over time, I have also started to take questions about my own views and positions more seriously. This was often catalysed by interactions with the press⁹³ and with policy-makers (described in the first part of

⁹³ When the LTTE was defeated in May 2009, the logical question of Dutch radio interviewers was: is it a good thing that the LTTE are dead? I had met LTTE cadres on several occasions and we had hosted political wing leader Tamilselvan and his delegation at Clingendael (9 February 2004). When the peace process collapsed and most of the Western world had blacklisted the LTTE (while often soft-peddling on the government's gross violations and political recalcitrance) I had frequently argued against the state bias of international actors, and a desk officer at the Dutch

this chapter), when I could no longer hide behind post-modern tricks of unravelling discourses and constructions (for a similar discussion, see Goode 2006). The evaluation of Norway's peace efforts in Sri Lanka (Goodhand et al. 2011a) built strongly on our earlier academic engagements, but the main conclusions also required a fairly head-on engagement with both moral issues and realpolitical trade-offs. Through these kinds of assignments, my research seeped through to policy criticism and recommendations, but I have become critical of the idea that research findings can be "translated" to policy. More often than not, the meticulous detail of ethnographic studies does not lend itself to be translated into the straightjackets of policy. And typically, it provides poor answers to the concrete questions policymakers grapple with.

But, to return to the concerns of my senior Muslim interlocutor from Kinniya, I did provide some voice for Muslim concerns in studies for donors and diplomats. And to return to the worries of my Sinhala translator, my outputs differed from the Channel 4 documentary in the sense that they were not straightforward indictments of one or other party (and had much less impact, partly for that reason). Both my academic and policy-oriented work culminates in this PhD and although my primary aim is to deliver a robust piece of scholarly work, I hope this PhD provides a basis for critical reflection on peace-oriented interventions. As elaborated earlier, the four articles that follow in Part II debunk overly teleological and interventionist understandings of post-war transition. They do not provide concrete recommendations, and they are not an academic effort "for peace", as advocated by Megoran (2011). His and other's (e.g. Kobayasi 2009) recent plea for geographers to leave behind the warlike history of their discipline and put themselves in the service of peace enters too slippery a normative and political ground for my taste, as was discussed in section 2.6. However, I believe the analysis presented in this PhD provides food for thought to practitioners and policy-makers, most of whom realise after all, that their policy slogans and models do not sufficiently appreciate the complexity of the contexts in which they intervene. In retrospect, I thus feel that the hundreds of people that exposed themselves in my interviews need not regret their willingness to talk to me. The research has provided inputs into policy and it may provide more in the future, but none of it has directly altered their conditions and opportunities in a

Ministry of Foreign Affairs had plainly told me they saw me as "a bit too pro-LTTE". These moments flashed through my head during that radio interview, but I answered "yes". It startled me that I had never before given a frank answer to such an obvious question. I turned my answer into a "yes, but", though "Yes", because I had come to realise just how difficult it would be to negotiate an agreement with the LTTE and because of the massive violations against (often Tamil) civilians. "But", because I felt the main obstacle remained with the Sri Lankan state, which refused accountability about the massacre that they had willingly allowed to take place and which failed to even hint at political reforms towards a resolution of the conflict.

meaningful way. Some of them, I know enjoyed the encounter. Some made smart use of their association with me. Many others may not even remember the so-manieth foreign journalist, aid worker or researcher that passed by to ask questions. Others yet did not survive the last phases of the war.

Chapter 5

Re-articulating political geography in the wake of war

The front page of this document shows one of eastern Sri Lanka's many run-down ferries. Like many of the region's inhabitants, I spent quite a bit of time on these floating pontoons, hoping the engine would last, enjoying the birds and the views, and chatting to the people around me. Many travellers would watch the fascinating eddying water in the wake of our ship. Different currents would whirl around each other, causing waves, unsettling sediments, only to settle – eventually – in a new, but ever moving composition. The title of this dissertation alludes to that image, as it captures the fluidity of the present situation in eastern Sri Lanka. The region is in a state of flux, with multiple forces working around and against each other. These forces may not always be so visible, but some of them are steady and have far-reaching impact. Like in the wake of a ferry, they swirl around each other, bringing about a composition that is somehow new, and yet similar to what went before.

The preceding chapters elucidated the political geography perspective that this dissertation takes on the volatile processes and changes that take place when a war ends. My research ventures to explore post-war transition in a non-teleological and non-interventionist way. It exercises caution about scholarly work on “peacebuilding” and “war to peace transition”, which is prone to misconceiving post-war transition as a directional process towards an ill-defined peace, reducing the emergent condition to a mere legacy of the conflict, and ignoring the fascinating changes that escape the script of pro- and contra- peace categories. War does not “suspend” the concepts and theories of social science and society is not altogether reset when it ends. There is thus no *a priori* reason to study pre-war, war-time, and post-war societies in fundamentally different ways and privilege this cadence of events over other processes that take place in a society.

I have aspired to study eastern Sri Lanka through the lens of political geography, by unravelling the empirical changes and continuities over the period 2001-2011. This turbulent decade, I argue, comprises the re-articulation of a society's ongoing struggle over longer-term existential questions about how people define their own identities, their other and the projects of rule they are subject to. The aforementioned pillars of a political geography perspective – identity, the political, the state and space – continue to play a central role, but there are many and sometimes dramatic changes, in the configuration of power relations, the relative bargaining positions, the crafting or re-activation of boundaries, and space for manoeuvre. Chapter 3 discussed the overall developments in eastern Sri Lanka in the past decade. The articles in Part II shed light on a specific aspect of these changes and continuities. And although they were not written as such, each article puts one of the pillars of chapter 2's political geography perspective in the foreground: article 1 (on Muslim dynamics) highlights identity, article 2 (on elections) foregrounds politics, and article 3 (on the civil service) grapples with the state. Article 4 (on re-territorialisation) forms the capstone of these analyses. It draws on insights from the other articles to construct a larger narrative of post-war transition.

This final chapter will connect the insights of the preceding chapters to the main body of this PhD: the four articles in Part II. Apart from discussing the main argument the articles, I will explain how they complement each other, and how they relate to the wider argument of this dissertation.

Article 1: "Islam, politics and violence in eastern Sri Lanka"

The first article taps into the conceptual debates on identity. It is pitched to a slightly different debate – on Islam and politics (e.g. Bayat 2007; Robinson 2007; Sidel 2007; Soares and Osella 2009) – but it is closely connected to the discussions on identity and conflict. As reiterated in section 2.2, the mobilisation of identity often stands at the core of conflict causation, but group identities and boundaries, in turn, are often implicated by political violence. Article 1 engages with these questions by exploring the case of the Muslim community in Akkaraipattu (see Map 3A).

As mentioned in the contextual background (chapter 3), the Muslim community takes a peculiar position in Sri Lanka's ethno-political landscape. In fact, struggles over Muslim identities in eastern Sri Lanka exhibit all the substantive

and political questions about what makes an ethnic group. Unlike elsewhere in the world, they define themselves as an ethnic, rather than just a religious group, but it is not so clear what the ethnic label does *analytically*. Religion is the defining feature of the Muslims, who share their language and large parts of their culture, social organisation, and history with their Tamil neighbours. The *political* importance of the label, on the other hand, is monumental. The struggle against the category of “Islamic Tamils” goes back well into colonial history, but the celebration of a separate ethnic identity for the Muslims flourished when Sri Lanka’s post-colonial politics produced opposing formations of Sinhala majoritarianism and Tamil separatism. The escalation of violence in the 1980s, the administrative merging of the north and east in the Indo Lankan Accord (1987), the LTTE expulsion of Muslims from the north, and the onslaught of Tamil-Muslim violence in the east (see chapter 3) produced an acute awareness of the Muslim identity and its boundaries. Whilst mimicking Tamil and Sinhala ethno-nationalism, Muslim ethno-nationalism continued to struggle against its own contradictions, however.

Article 1 shows how different identity layers continued to play a role in the context of armed conflict. The war made “Muslimness” of paramount importance – as the general literature suggests.⁹⁴ The Muslim community has all reason to stand united, to close ranks against its common enemies, and indeed ethnic fault lines have hardened. But on the other hand, they are also a deeply divided group of people. The war has paradoxically united *and* divided Sri Lanka’s Muslim community. It has bolstered the importance of a Muslim identity, but it has also raised the stakes about how that identity is defined. The article discusses some parallel trajectories that affected Muslim identity in Akkaraipattu. Sometimes Muslims define Muslimness in staunchly religious terms, but it carries ethnic or political meaning as well. One Sufi shrine evokes a sense of local belonging and territorial boundaries, while members of the globalised Tabligh movement reject such issues as pollution and emphasises the global Muslim umma. The article goes on to show that in everyday practice, these discursive positions are not applied in rigid and consistent way. This becomes particularly clear in people’s engagement with politically sensitive issues. Akkaraipattu’s Muslims navigate between what the article categorises as “principled politics” (e.g. advocating the Muslim cause), “pragmatic politics” (e.g. patrimonialism) and “anti-politics” (e.g. attempts to keep religion apart from electoral politics).

⁹⁴ E.g. Dewarajah (1994), Knoezer (1998), McGilvray (2008) and other works cited in the article. After publication, several interesting articles have appeared on this subject, such as Hasbullah and Korf (2012) and McGilvray (2011).

The armed conflict has thus not turned Akkaraipattu's Muslims into a cohesive whole; it has produced intra-ethnic fissures as well. As mentioned in chapter 3, these fissures can give rise to violent escalation: the tearing down of Payilwan's mosque in Kattankudy by wahabi-inspired Muslims (labelled as Tawhid) is probably the most extreme example. The salient role of such internationalised Muslim movements reminds us that the war is not the only factor here; globalisation (labour migration and the influx of Islamic revival movements like the Tabligh or Tawhid) also has a major impact. This offsets the war-peace cadence that dominates current thinking on Sri Lanka. The field research and analysis of this article were finished before the defeat of the LTTE in 2009, but the issues it raises cast their shadow ahead. Many of the prevalent tensions are not a derivative of the war and continued after the war was declared over. Tussles between religious groupings, about the meaning of being Muslim, and about political allegiances continued to trouble Akkaraipattu's inhabitants after the war. Divergent genealogical claims and anxieties over ethnic or religious purity and boundary preservation get reshuffled in the post-war context. Longer-histories of identity construction and the more recent history of war get re-articulated in post-war processes of identity construction and reconstruction. And this spawns shifts of emphasis, adjusted forms of loyalty and new forms of rupture. Article 2 expands on this analysis.

Article 2: "Showing one's colours: the political work of elections in post-war Sri Lanka"

The identity struggles within the Muslim community and their paradoxical relationship with politics become particularly pronounced during election time. Article 2 explores the turbulent period of election fever, with a case study of Sri Lanka's first post-war parliamentary elections (2010) as they unfolded in the Muslim towns of Trincomalee District. It engages with the work of some of the political anthropologists referred to in section 2.3 (Banerjee 2008; 2011; Bertrand et al. 2007; Cupples 2009; Paley 2008, and Spencer 2003; 2007; 2008). These authors steer away from an interest-based understandings of politics – be it clientelism, rational-deliberation or consensus-seeking – and explore the ritual, formative and performative qualities of elections.

The political work of elections, article 2 argues, reaches well beyond the electoral moment. Rather than people deciding on the composition of government,

elections involve the crafting (and re-crafting) of political identities, the activation (and de-activation) of political boundaries and the forging (or severing) of political loyalties. They are, in Spencer's words, "dramas of unity and difference" (2007: 78). The article describes the long sequence of well-scripted phases in an imaginary plot of nominations (electoral lists), realignments, campaigning, the casting of votes and subsequent celebrations, settling scores and new realignments. In line with the conceptual review in section 2.3, the article posits that antagonism – the divide between "us" and "them" – is constitutive of politics. The key question, however is: which "us" and which "them"? As became clear in the summary of article 1, Sri Lanka's Muslims have several ways of defining themselves and their others, and this produces a substantial amount of reshuffling.

The chronological narrative of the 2010 elections in Trincomalee's Muslim community engenders three interlacing storylines. Politics look substantively different from the vantage point of each of these narratives, and there is no obvious hierarchy between them. The first one involves the enactment of national citizenship. This is most clearly dramatised in the decorum, dignity and duty that people display when they present themselves at the polling booths. Muslim politics comprises the second trajectory and it is here that the tensions between principled politics and pragmatic politics discussed in article 1 become clearly manifest. Muslim voters and their politicians were torn between the cause of "the Muslim people", who feel besieged by increasingly salient signs of Sinhala dominance, and the feeling that "opposition is pointless". After all, an overly militant stance would block access to government patronage. That brings us to the third storyline: town-based identities and personal loyalties. There were strong rivalries between the various Muslim towns in the district (and their local political patrons), and voters felt strong affinities to their locality and the political dynasties associated with them.

Elections press different political narratives together and this helps us resolve the puzzling fact that the polls seem to matter a lot more than warranted by the little gain people can expect from a new government. Elections nevertheless bring about weeks of turbulence, excitement, suspense and intrigue. In brief, my analysis is as follows. The interaction between different political narratives – propelling different kinds of political identity and us-them antagonism – explains two things. Firstly, the temporarily intensified relation between the nation, different group identities, and the individual during election time accounts for the

sense of gravity vested in elections. The casting of an individual opinion becomes an act of citizenship and the village becomes the stage for national contests. Personal and town-based rivalries assume new importance when they get inscribed in the registers of the national political plot. For just one moment, destitute inhabitants of the former warzone, whose opinion never carries much weight, become citizens with a vote. And even if it would not affect the electoral outcome, the fact that they get to perform their franchise has some existential significance.

The second point concerns the excitement and anxiety, which are manifest in "election time". People are used to navigating different political identities and loyalties, and subtly adopt different standpoints and self-representations depending on what the occasion requires. The key point about elections is: people often cannot satisfy all these loyalties with one vote. They are forced to show their colours. The chameleon-like behaviour that characterises much of everyday political life in eastern Sri Lanka (and which was manifest in the jockeying between principled, pragmatic and anti-politics in article 1) comes under stress when people need to confirm different political loyalties at once. If the voting imperatives of being a good Muslim, a dedicated townsman, and the loyal friend to a political family are contradictory, something has got to give.

What does the article tell us specifically about post-war transition? Firstly, it reinforces the point made above about reshuffling identity struggles in the post-war context. Elections are often taken as the ceremonial closure, sealing the end of war, the symbolic turning point where the power of the gun yields to the ballot. Article 2 corroborates other critical studies (e.g. De Zeeuw and Kumar 2006) in showing this is over-simplistic. Sri Lanka's electoral democracy was not suspended by the war, it got deeply entangled in it. The post-war elections were very similar to previous ones: the scripted phases, the tensions around it, the ceremonial dimensions. Elections continue to be an arena for dramatising contestation between and within ethnic communities after the war. This is particularly true for the Muslim electorate, which continues to navigate the difficult political terrain marked by Sinhala ethno-nationalism and (now less outspoken forms of) Tamil ethno-separatism. But the point about the continuities of the political is more general. There are many layers to the plot and not all of them are a derivative of the "master cleavage" – to use Kalyvas' term (2006) – between the Sinhala-dominated government and the Tamil insurgency. Other forms of antagonism and contestation outlast the end of the war, be it

competition between towns, between Muslims and Sinhalese (article 2), between different religious groupings, or between politicians and religious leaders (article 1). The preoccupation with Muslim identity and the political imperatives stemming from that do not wither in the post-war era and this continues to cause divides and tensions.

That does not mean there were no important changes. The end of the war and the defeat of the LTTE did make a big difference in the political dynamics around the 2010 elections. The LTTE has been adept at violent intimidation, “hartals” (enforced shutdowns) and electoral boycotts. Tamil voters in particular used to be subject to LTTE voting instructions. Though there was no space to discuss this in the article, the wartime parliamentary side-car of the LTTE (the TULF, TNA)⁹⁵ secured almost the entire Tamil vote in the 2010 elections, while Karuna’s TMVP and its break-away faction led by Pillayan (the self-proclaimed representatives of the eastern Tamils discussed in section 3.3) were wiped out. That fascinating story remains to be researched. Among the Sinhalese community, politics had always been determined by the rivalry of the two main parties: the UNP and SLFP. This time, however, the UNP faced a protracted electoral impasse and the military victory boosted president Mahinda Rajapaksa’s (SLFP) credentials. Enormous statues, re-invigoration of Buddhist sites in the war zone, and massive (foreign funded) investments in infrastructure bolstered his image as the father of the nation. When Rajapaksa got re-elected as president in January 2010 and his defeated opponent General Sarath Fonseka was tried in a dubious court case, the subsequent parliamentary elections were a done deal. With a near uni-polar political spectrum and crumbling opposition parties, the bargaining positions changed significantly. There were more resources to gain and there were fewer alternatives. This resulted in a rat race towards government portfolios, on gradually deteriorating terms.

The triumphant Sinhala victory mood fuelled, rather than soothed, Muslim anxieties. While the Muslims generally applauded the defeat of the LTTE, the influx of Sinhala settlers, the doing up of Buddhist shrine and the expansion of military involvement in the civil sphere (further discusses in article 4)⁹⁶ caused major Muslim anxiety. This involved the recalibration of us-them divides. While it was more important than ever to be in government in terms of patronage,

⁹⁵ The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) merged with the Eelam People’s Revolutionary Liberation front (EPRLF) in the early 2000s to form the Tamil National Alliance (TNA). Both alliances maintained strong connections with the LTTE leadership.

⁹⁶ For visual illustration, see pictures 5 and 6 on page 88.

political sentiments and concerns of Muslim minority rights pointed directly the other way. The defeat of the LTTE took away the prime counter-weight against the (perceived) threat of Sinhala domination. This had all kinds of surprising consequences, not least in the civil service, the subject to which we turn in article 3.

Article 3: "In the eye of the storm: Sri Lanka's front-line civil servants in transition"

This article engages with the anthropological and political sociological literature on the state, discussed in section 2.4 (Hansen and Stepputat 2001; 2006; Li 2007; Lund 2007; Mitchell 1991). It builds on the insight that the state as a rational and coherent actor that hangs above the fray of society is a myth, but that this myth is crucially important. People's imagination of the state provides state practices and institutions with a sense of naturalness, indispensability and perseverance. This perspective opens up intellectual space to grapple with more convoluted political landscapes. When there are multiple forms of authority and claims to sovereignty, the actual accomplishment of rule is compromised and contingent. This then provides us with a conceptual springboard to move beyond the overly simplistic suggestion that war is a form of state failure or collapse (thus stepping in the traces of authors like De Waal 2009; Gellner 2007; Hagmann and Péclard 2010; Korf et al. 2010a; Vandekerckhove 2011).

Article 3 follows enters into these debates with a study of a much more specific set of actors, which are paradigmatic of the state: civil servants. More precisely, it analyses how a distinct set of Tamil public administrators (so-called Divisional Secretaries and their entourage⁹⁷) operated in and after the war. The empirical section unravels the peculiar arrangement that emerged towards the end of Sri Lanka's separatist war (2001). Both the LTTE and the central government projected their state ambitions in the war-torn areas. The insurgents went at quite some length to reinforce their rebellion with the gradual consolidation of a *de facto* Tamil Eelam. This state façade included symbols (a "national" flag, songs, martyr days), institutions (Tamil Eelam police, courts, and banks) and rules (taxation, banning alcohol, severe punishments for crime).⁹⁸ It would be a mistake, however, to simply pit this assemblage of Tamil Eelam against "the Sri Lankan state", and this becomes very clear from the narrative of the civil

⁹⁷ For the typical image of a DS office, see photo 22 on page 93.

⁹⁸ For discussion on these institutions and troubles of political and analytical interpretation around them, see Fuglerud (2009), Korf et al (2010a), Sarvananthan (2007), Stokke (2006), and Uyangoda (2007; 2011).

servants featuring in article 3. The LTTE did not simply reject, expel or kill government servants, many of whom were after all Tamils. The movement drew pre-existing state institutions into its orbit and this resulted in a very hybrid kind of governance. Government hierarchies in turn contradicted protocol by conniving that lower-ranking officers colluded with the LTTE. Civil servants could resist undesired orders trickling down the institutional hierarchy on the count that the ground reality was unsuitable, that the LTTE would not allow it. And politicians – normally a major source of interference – had limited space to enforce bureaucratic transfers or capture public resources. The militarised struggle trumped their politicking and thuggery.

Civil servants had conflicting loyalties and were answerable to pressures from both sides of the front, but their work did not stop. Bureaucratic postings, administrative endorsement, and the delivery of basic services and infrastructure continued (if constrained) across the front line. State bureaucrats navigated the contradictory state projects of the government (Sri Lanka) and the rebels (Tamil Eelam) and to some extent they managed to reconcile this practice with the appearance of rational bureaucratic order. In fact, they often alluded to archetypal bureaucratic notions like “keeping the files clean”, providing “transparency”, or “consulting with grass-roots officers” when legitimising their transgressive practices.

The article thus shows that public administration was not a mere victim of war. And neither was the public administration a plain victor of the post-war context. The defeat of the LTTE heralded a major recalibration of the force field for bureaucrats. Security conditions improved, the threat of LTTE intimidations melted away, and there was a marked increase in the resources flowing into the eastern periphery, which had long been heavily curtailed. But the public administration also faced new difficulties, as the region became more permeable for “normal” Sri Lankan politics. Inadvertently, the war had buffered the civil service both against the pervasive interference by political entrepreneurs, and against state policies that were considered harmful for the Tamil minority. With the defeat of the LTTE, Tamil bureaucrats lost their counterweight against controversial government policies and interference by local politicians. While they applauded the end of the war (and were often quite critical of the LTTE), they also bewailed the new reality that had emerged. Civil servants had to collaborate with what they perceived as Sinhala colonisation of the east. They had to put up with a more assertive role of the military in civil affairs. And they had to get used

to receiving regular phone calls from politicians to forget about protocol and fix this, that or the other for them. That brings us back to the elections of article 2, because the power-brokers making these phone calls were the same politicians who secured block votes by showing off with their ability to deliver patronage. The bargaining positions had changed and this did not escape the voters, who were impressed by the new abilities of strong-arm candidates. The sudden opening up of patronage channels was "like magic" to them.

Article 4: "The political geography of post-war transition: re-territorialisation in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka"

This final article brings together many of the issues in the first three articles and places them more firmly in a geographical perspective. Article 4 is explicitly tailored to debates in political geography. It takes note of recent discussions on geographical engagement with peace (Flint 2005; Kobayasi 2009; Megoran 2011), but criticises the normative conceptual overtones of these appeals, and posits that contributions from political ecology (e.g. Brottem and Unruh 2009; Lunstrum 2009; Peluso and Vandergeest 2011; Vandergeest and Peluso 1995) and critical geopolitics (e.g. Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 1995; Kirsch and Flint 2011; Ó Tuathail and O'Loughlin 2009) – if rather fragmented – provide a more robust vantage point for the empirical analysis of post-war transitions. Article 4 builds on the insights of section 2.5 (on the way space is demarcated, connected, inhabited and governed) to suggest that the trope of re-territorialisation sheds useful light on post-war transition.

The perspective of re-territorialisation enables the article to weave together a wide array of salient processes, ranging from resettlement and relocation, the refurbishment of sacred sites, soaring tourist arrivals, the proclamation of military zones, as well as changing patterns in religious conduct, youth behaviour and shifting social morals. In doing so, the article adds a spatial dimension to the aforementioned controversies over alleged Sinhala domination and colonisation after the war, but it also opens up a less well-charted analytical domain: the moral panic spawned by increased circulation and exposure in previously forlorn region. More specifically, the article explores three sites in Trincomalee District to explore the transformation from the "warscape" of government- and LTTE-controlled areas (2001) to the "post-warscape" of a region without armed insurgents, opening up to the world, and undergoing "development" (2011). The first site (Veeramannagar) used to be an LTTE controlled village and now finds

itself reconnected to the outside. The second place (Lankapatuna, or Ilankaithurai) used to be a desolate rock with an LTTE gun post in the war, but has now been reinstalled as a Buddhist sacred site attracting large numbers of (mainly Sinhala) tourists and pilgrims (see pictures 18, 19 and 20 on page 92). And the third site (Nilaveli) discusses the plight of erstwhile camp inhabitants who were relocated in a new settlement.

Following the description of these three sites, the article turns to the prevalent discursive interpretations of the welter of changes that have been taking place. Political geography, I argue, is central to the way people understand the ongoing transition in Trincomalee District. The article concludes with two central observations. Firstly, post-war re-territorialisation is in part about the spatial consolidation of a "victor's peace". Unsurprisingly, this process is valued differently by different communities. In short, the anti-government discourse (popular among the Tamil and Muslim minorities) stitches together the above-described developments as a multi-pronged attempt at colonisation by the Sinhala majority. New Sinhala settlements, the refurbishments of Buddhist shrines, the declaration of military zones and tourism zones, the mushrooming of Sinhala-owned hotels all re-territorialise Trincomalee District as a Sinhala-dominated space. In this view, spatial demarcations, settlement patterns and symbolic claims on sacred space jointly serve to "put down this uprising forever", much in line with state attempts at pacifying the island's northeastern frontier in earlier periods of history (summarised in chapter 3). Conversely, the government interpretation (popular among Sinhalese) builds on an equally historic discourse that rejects the ethno-spatial claim on a district within a united country: why should Trincomalee, which has a multi-ethnic history, remain a pre-dominantly Tamil and Muslim space? This discourse renders technical the ethnically charged controversies by subordinating geography to development-planning, thus raising rhetorical questions like: what's wrong with turning jungle into farmland for the rural poor? And with countering the island's deplorable economic predicament, by investing in one of the rare growth sectors (tourism) and re-connecting the Trincomalee harbour with the national economy?

Secondly, the article highlights cross-ethnic anxieties about the region's exposure to new influences. These sentiments offset the binaries of government versus anti-government, ethnic majority versus minority. As discussed in chapter 3, Sri Lanka's east coast used to be both secluded – isolated from the rest of the world by checkpoints, frontlines and poor infrastructure – and subject to the

surveillance of the government military and the LTTE. Post-war security and mobility cleared the way for trade, school buses and family visits, but also heralded moral panic about threats to the cultural purities and local traditions that were inadvertently preserved by wartime isolation. The region's inhabitants were now faced with drunken tourists, drug consumption, youth procrastinating on the town junction, access to internet pornography, massage parlours (some of which smacked of prostitution), women riding motorcycles, religious conversions to flourishing evangelical churches (see picture 17 on page 91 for illustration), and eroding respect for community authorities. These may not be the first things that spring to mind when researching war endings, but they were a prime source of concern for many of Trincomalee's inhabitants. And they were a source of agony for Catholic priests, mosque leaders and Buddhist monks alike.

Article 4's discussion of re-territorialisation in Sri Lanka's frontier region confirms some of the conclusions on post-war transition in Sri Lanka in articles 1, 2 and 3: about continued contestation and antagonism; about a government consolidating its power, but getting compromised on the way; about ethnic anxieties over genealogy and belonging. More so than the previous articles, the fourth article details the concerns about Sinhala domination: the tourism zone, the military zone, the new settlers and the expectable shifts in the ethnic demography. And perhaps most importantly, the article's analysis of increased circulation and exposure in previously a forlorn region underlines the contingencies and uncontrolled dynamics of post-war transition.

These controversies over localised notions of purity, tradition and chasteness escape the analytical cadence of government domination and ethnic rivalry. They reverberate with a more fundamental analytical register around migration and exposure as a source of "moral disorder". That brings us back to the work of Jonathan Spencer (2003), who traced the colonial and post-colonial antecedents of these anxieties (for discussion see section 2.5). The moral panic over such disturbance may be particularly evocative at war endings given the intense re-territorialisation described in article 4, but there are dear parallels to other historical turning points. The massive influx of foreign aid agencies into Sri Lanka's northeastern war zone – first after the 2002 ceasefire and then followed by a quantum-leap after the 2004 tsunami (e.g. Korf 2004; 2005; 2006a; Korf et al. 2010b) – are an obvious place to look for parallels. Timmo Gaasbeek's ethnographic work (2010b) on the cultural indignation around the parties of young and adventurous foreign aid workers along the devastated east coast

engages explicitly controversies over cultural exchange. But the more fundamental historical parallel lies with Sri Lanka's radical economic liberalisation after 1977. The sentiments in my last article ring very similar to the concerns about dignity and cultural preservation spawned by post-1977 migration and exposure to foreign influences. Though the controversies about female dignity and chastity (discussed in section 2.5) did not reach the northeast in quite the same way, changes did seep through to the war zone. For example, post-1977 labour migration to the Middle East lubricated the remarkable proliferation of Islamic reform movements like Tabligh Jamaat, which (as we saw in article 1) played a salient role in the contestation over Muslim identity. And the Tablighis, in turn, bear some resemblance with the evangelical churches that swept across Sri Lanka's post-war landscape (article 4).

All these examples connect to a larger, cross-ethnic historical narrative of the island's intensified exposure to and interaction with the world – through migration, an open economy, communication technology and so on – and the impact of this on many aspects of Sri Lankan society: religious reform movements, social conventions, language, the political economy, and the transformation of political constituencies and agendas. The register of exposure to globalised flows reminds us that societies undergoing war or emerging from it are not over-determined by this transition. The above processes are not easily moulded into the analytical categories of the war (e.g. ethnic identity groups; the presence or absence of organised armed violence). We thus return to one of the central points made in these introductory chapters: the need for a non-teleological interpretation of post-war contexts. Post-war transition does not override everything else. There are other processes at stake, which interact with the cadence of a war's ending, but are not simply a derivative of it.

In closing

These observations resonate with east Sri Lanka's history of a contested borderland, with competing projects of rule, claims on territory and genealogy, and waxing and waning external influences. In recent decades, the region's history was heavily influenced by the escalation of Sri Lanka's post-independence politics into an ethno-separatist war. The political contentions of Sinhala majoritarianism and Tamil secessionism and the ensuing violence affected identities, antagonisms and the political landscape in eastern Sri Lanka. But as shown in chapter 3, the onslaught between Sinhala and Tamil nationalism

(neither of which originates from the east) did not just descend upon the eastern periphery. The master-cleavage of Sri Lanka's armed conflict blended with more particular, localised identity struggles, genealogical claims, and forms of authority. Salient diversions from the simplified conflict plot – Tamil vs. Sinhala; LTTE vs. government – were the peculiar combination of interdependence and enmity that characterises Tamil-Muslim relations, and the proliferation of intra-Muslim conflicts.

The past decade has been a particularly turbulent one in eastern Sri Lanka. The four articles of this dissertation do not provide a comprehensive or representative overview of the region's transition from the simmering armed violence of 2001 to the post-war context of 2011. Rather, they provide four well-positioned and insightful stories of different dimensions of east Sri Lanka's transition. Each article emphasises one of the four pillars of the political geography perspective introduced in chapter 2. Whilst each article is pitched to a slightly different academic audience, there are many connections between them. Each intervention places a different set of people in the foreground – e.g. religious leaders, bureaucrats, or politicians – and this enables a switch of perspective. Outsiders become insiders, background issues become vital controversies, and exceptions become rules. To mention some examples, the Muslim identity struggles of article 1 assume new importance during the elections in article 2. The politicians that claim the central stage in election time become a source of trouble for bureaucrats in article 3. The central government policies of "Sinhala colonisation" that Tamil bureaucrats complain about in article 3 produce concrete, territorial consequences in article 4. And the post-war anxiety about external influences and the influx globalised religious movements in article 4 links back to the Muslim identity struggles during war time in article 1.

Taken together, the four articles argue against a teleological understanding of a transition from "war" to "peace". They highlight some of the longer-term developments and fundamental continuities between war-time and post-war eastern Sri Lanka. They explore the re-articulation of identity politics, different forms antagonism, the compromised enactment of the state, contestation over territory, and anxiety about external influx and influence. There is no fundamental difference in the way identity, politics, public authority and spatial patterns come about. Yet, this process of re-articulation brings along many important changes, in relations, bargaining positions, people's space for manoeuvre, the trumping of one form of antagonism over others, the sources of

anxiety, the legitimacy of different forms of authority, and claims to sovereignty. These are all subject to redefinition and recalibration. More concretely, it makes a great deal of difference that the LTTE has demised, that shelling has stopped, that checkpoints have been lifted and that infrastructure is being restored, but the existential questions that were of pivotal importance to the war – how people define their own identities, their others and their relation to projects of rule – are still acutely relevant. And so long as the answers to those questions spawn fierce disagreements and anxieties, it is safe to say that Sri Lanka is a post-war, but conflict-ridden country.

In conceptualising post-war transition as a process of re-articulation, the articles open up analytical space for developments, which may seem far removed from prevalent peacebuilding, like increased cultural exposure and concerns about local traditions, soaring political interference with the public administration, and new forms of antagonism. This broadens our understanding of such transition and it helps us escape the straightjackets that often characterise policy checklists and intervention logics in war-torn contexts. As pointed out in chapter 4, many of the questions that led my research stem from an engagement with policy and a strong sense that the debates around Sri Lanka's failed peace process gravitated towards worldviews that were current in Colombo's echelons of power. Over the past decade, we encountered many processes and changes in east Sri Lanka, which did not match the categories of intervention (be it for or against peace), but which nevertheless proved fundamentally important. Expanding our analysis to the wider set of post-war developments – intended and unintended, old or new, locally or externally driven – will not provide us with easily implementable prescriptions. But it will take away some of the blinkers and blind spots that have troubled intervention before. It will highlight contingent and uncontrollable processes. And by directing our attention to the many aspects of people's life that are not simply a derivative of war, it may in fact provide us with some glimmers of hope.

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List of abbreviations

3-D approach	Defence, diplomacy and development approach
BCE	Before common era
CE	Common era
DS	Divisional Secretary
EPC	Eastern Provincial Council
EPRLF	Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front
EROS	Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students
EU	European Union
IPKF	Indian Peace-Keeping Force
ISGA	Interim Self-Governing Authority
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front)
LLRC	Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PLOTE	People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SLMC	Sri Lanka Muslim Congress
SLMM	Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission
TMVP	Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (Tamil People's Liberation Tigers)
TNA	Tamil National Alliance
TULF	Tamil United Liberation Front
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNP	United National Party
UTHR(J)	University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna)

Part II: The articles

**Four different angles
on war and post-war transition in Eastern Sri
Lanka**

Article 1

"Islam, politics and violence in eastern Sri Lanka", *Journal of Asian Studies*, 70(3): 730-753.

Islam, Politics and Violence in Eastern Sri Lanka

BART KLEM

This article bridges Sri Lankan studies and the academic debate on the relation between contemporary Islam and politics. It constitutes a case study of the Muslim community in Akkaraipattu on Sri Lanka's war-ridden east coast. Over two decades of ethnically colored conflict have made Muslim identity of paramount importance, but the meanings attached to that identity vary substantively. Politicians, mosque leaders, Sufis and Tablighis define the ethnic, religious and political dimensions of "Muslimness" differently and this leads to intra-Muslim contradictions. The case study thus helps resolve the puzzle of Sri Lankan Muslims: they are surrounded by hostility, but they continue to be internally divided. Akkaraipattu's Muslims jockey between principled politics, pragmatic politics and anti-politics, because they have to navigate different trajectories. This article thus corroborates recent studies on Islam elsewhere that argue for contextualized and nuanced approaches to the variegated interface between Islam and politics.

INTRODUCTION

WHEN MUSLIMS PRAY ON a ferry, an Indonesian friend once told me, they are confronted with a challenge to their everyday routine. As the boat maneuvers across the ocean, its orientation in relation to Mecca, and thus the direction of prayer, changes. During challenging routes and stormy weather this may result in frequent changes in the *mise en scène* (and frequent runs to the railing or the bathroom for those with a weaker stomach). This metaphor illustrates that religious practice and affiliations do not remain unaffected when navigating through new terrain. Changes in context generate questions of orientation, identity and boundaries.

The interaction between religion and politics features saliently in the academic debate on contemporary Islam. Globalization, Islamic revival and reform in conjunction with modern politics have made for a tantalizing mix of processes (see Soares and Osella 2009 for an overview of the discussion). While Islamists revived the concept of a caliphate and liberals charged that democracy is inherently secular, academic research has sought more nuanced ways of scrutinizing the nexus between religion and politics. It has highlighted the manifold ways in which religious symbols and ideas have penetrated politics. Similarly, political contestation and patronage have blended with religious

identity, religious movements and religious governance. Various authors have pointed towards the socio-economic processes of modernization: how education, rationalization, urbanization, and the emergence of a middle class produced Islamic revival movements that challenged and overthrew the “traditional” religious elites (e.g. Bayat 2007; Eickelman and Piscatori 1996; Hasan 2007; Hefner 2000). The interface between Islam and democratic contestation thus came forward as multi-faceted in various case studies (Bayat 2007; Hefner 2000; Sidel 2007; Tepe 2008). It is in this tradition of exploring the paradoxes and complexity of everyday religious and political practice that this article is written.

Sri Lanka’s Muslims – a group of about 1.6 million people, constituting 8.7 per cent of the national population (Census Department 2008¹) – have barely featured in these wider debates on Islam. Apart from its historic connection to Islam around the Indian Ocean (McGilvray 2008), this group is of particular interest because of Sri Lanka’s recent history of violent conflict, which has impacted on the connections between religion and identity politics. Competing ethno-nationalism between Sri Lanka’s two largest population groups – Sinhalese and Tamils – put pressure on societal boundaries and identities (Goodhand and Klem 2005). From the 1980s onwards, the Muslims in the north and east of the country found themselves on the frontline between Tamil separatists and government counter-insurgency troops. The case of the Sri Lankan Muslims thus connects contemporary Islam to a context of war and ethnic tensions. That brings us to the questions this article aims to address: how did the war interact with Muslim identities? And how, in turn, has this encounter affected the interaction between Islam and politics? Surprisingly, the Sri Lankan literature on these questions is very thin. There are relevant accounts of Muslim history, of ethnic contestation, and of contemporary politics as well as some ethnographic work on Islam, but very little that draws connections between ethnic, religious and political realms, while it is those connections that explain many of the tensions and paradoxes we witness among Sri Lankan Muslims. This article will explore these inter-relations using a detailed case study of Akkaraipattu, a town on Sri Lanka’s east coast. This coastal strip is the place where Muslims are demographically most significant in Sri Lanka. Akkaraipattu is one of various Muslim pockets, but it is of particular relevance because the town is one of the few places where Muslims and Tamils live in similar numbers. The availability of good anthropological and historical work on Akkaraipattu (McGilvray 1982; 2008) was another reason to select this town.

Faced with common threats and enemies, one would expect Muslims to stand together in a place like Akkaraipattu. A bolstered ethnic and religious identity would converge with a more militant political outlook, and even jihad inspired violence could easily be imagined. But this proves to be a mistake. It becomes

¹This is a rough estimate. Census figures are from 2001, but for seven districts (Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Mullaitivu, Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Vavuniya and Mannar) the latest available data are from 1981.

clear from my findings as well as existing literature (Lewer and Ismail 2011; McGilvray and Raheem 2007) that decades of ethno-nationalism and armed conflict have not produced homogeneity or unity among Sri Lanka's Muslims in the war zone. On the contrary, I argue the war has affected Muslim identity in paradoxical ways and divergent interpretations of that identity have resulted in new intra-Muslim fault lines and contradictory political orientations. I contend that Akkaraipattu's Muslims have become more politically engaged, but – both for religious and practical reasons – they have also turned their back on politics. The result is an everyday jockeying between political and anti-political behavior, an everyday survival strategy that navigates between multiple boundaries and discourses. Apparently commonsensical contradictions – between religious fundamentalism and ethno-nationalism, between personal piety and collective politics, between modernity and tradition – exist, but they explain little as people blend and circumvent them.

The empirical material presented in this article is based on a sequence of fieldwork visits to eastern Sri Lanka in 2007 and 2008, and more generally on visits to the eastern region, more or less annually, from 2000 till the present. I stayed in Akkaraipattu for several weeks at a time to collect data, make observations and interview (in English or with Tamil or Sinhala translation) a wide range of people from different ethnic, religious, class, and political backgrounds. During the fieldwork in 2007 and 2008, 122 interviews were held² and it is from these encounters that I draw the core empirical material. The analysis emerged through a sequence field visits, group discussions with colleagues and academics from the region and joint seminars with a broader research team.³

²I made sure to speak with the religious leaders of different denominations, including maulavis, mosque administrators, Sufis, and leading members of Islamic reform movements. In addition, I interviewed Buddhist, Hindu and Christian leaders of different denominations, and other respected citizens, mainly school principals, journalists, local politicians, and businessmen. I also met with people who were not in leadership positions, some of whom in fact lived in rather deprived circumstances, for example in tsunami relocation schemes. In the region surrounding Akkaraipattu and in the capital Colombo, Sri Lanka, I interviewed people higher up in the religious hierarchies. Of the 122 interviews, 106 were with men, 8 with women, and 8 with men and women together. In terms of professional background, 43 were with religious leaders, 37 with “normal” citizens, 20 with NGO staff, 15 with respected businessmen and senior citizens, 4 with civil servants and 3 with politicians. Ethnically, 61 interviews were with Tamils, 47 with Muslims, 6 with Burghers, 5 with Sinhalese, 2 with expats and one with Kuravars. The religious division was as follows: 47 were Muslims (of which 2 Jamaat Islami, 4 Sufism, 11 Tabligh Jamaat), 44 were Christians (21 Catholic, 14 Methodist, 9 Evangelical), 18 were Hindus, 3 were Buddhists and in 10 cases, the religious background of the interviewees was either mixed or unknown to me. Many of the initial respondents were known to one of my Sri Lankan colleagues, some of whom were themselves respected citizens of Akkaraipattu. Given that these colleagues came from different ethnic, religious and regional backgrounds, they also connected me to rather different groups of people. In addition, I made sure to get in touch with people in other ways, by attending ceremonies or simply entering offices to get an appointment.

³The core members of this team were Jonathan Goodhand, Shahul Hasbullah, Benedikt Korf, Tudor Silva and Jonathan Spencer.

Some of the interviews had a highly performative character, because the informants saw it as a pious act to educate me.⁴ In other cases I had difficulty getting access as an outsider, for example with the leaders from Tawhid Jamaat (the smallest Islamic reform movement in Akkaraipattu) who refused to meet me⁵, or in capturing the view of female Muslims. In most cases, however, people were very willing to talk to me openly and took pleasure in telling me about their religious views and experiences. This was in part dependent on the time period. The study period was a volatile time of change, due to the turbulent political and military events. The everyday ebb and flow of tensions and incidents affected the space to talk. There were no military clashes in Akkaraipattu itself, but battles in the region as well as assassinations, round-ups and other forms of violence obviously affected people's willingness to speak and the way they emphasized or de-emphasized sensitive issues.

ISLAMIC REVIVAL AND POLITICS

The primary aim of this article is to help fill the voids in our understanding of religious and political practice among the Muslim community in contemporary Sri Lanka. Before I delve into that context, it is necessary to conceptually scrutinize religion and politics.

In general ...

Studies of religion are impeded by a definitional problem – its institutional, behavioral, spiritual and other facets are not easy to reconcile. In this article I de-emphasize the theological angle. I do not treat religion as an all-encompassing system of truth or an ensemble of personal or collective beliefs. Instead, this article takes a sociological focus and analyses religion through its social and institutional manifestations, though for many of my informants such a worldly interpretation would amount to heresy, as it transfers agency from God to people and reduces the divine, the magical and the spiritual to mere constructs that shape human behavior. This sociological perspective draws from Bourdieu's work and as pointed out by Sidel (in a different context), it treats religion as a "field structured by its own institutions, authority relations, instilled dispositions (*habitus*), means of production and accumulation, and representation of symbolic or spiritual capital [...]." (Sidel 2007, xi)

Though inherently worldly, the political is no less elusive conceptually; its red-taped boundaries tend to shift depending on time, place and interpretation.

⁴Members of the Islamic reform movement Tabligh Jamaat were a good example. Dressed as if attending a religious ceremony, they would let a rosary pass through their fingers as they extolled the virtues and purity of their movement. I tried to complement these formal discourses with a more grounded and everyday perspective by meeting people more than once and in divergent, informal contexts as well as by searching for people with different views.

⁵I did manage to interview them in other towns, including Kattankudy.

Labeling something as “political” or “apolitical” is itself a political act that delineates a normative space and apportions (il)legitimacy. Jonathan Spencer’s (2007) book on politics in South Asia underlines the conceptual problems of defining politics. He takes issue with the separation of formal and everyday politics and highlights the paradoxes in people’s engagement with it: they tend to see politics as “dirty” and “disturbing”, but are meanwhile attracted to the spectacle of it. They have high expectations of it; they work hard to be part of it and they dress up for electoral rallies. Spencer follows the path forged by Carl Schmitt and Chantal Mouffe (without of course adopting the ideological outlook of either author) in arguing that we miss the point when we think of politics as an arena of deliberation and consultation, a privileged space of rational moderation of conflicting interests. Instead, politics is inherently about defining friends and foes. “The political” in Mouffe’s terms is inevitably antagonistic and its currency consists of passions and group identities, rather than just interests (Mouffe 2005). Conflict and politics are by no means oppositional categories and politics does not put violence beyond use. Rather violence is “the heightened and intensified continuation of normal politics” (Spencer 2007, 120).

This view takes politics beyond a place like parliament and into the arena of communities and the everyday practice of rivaling identity groups and political entrepreneurs. The difficulty of separating religion from politics becomes obvious. Religion is dynamic and heterogeneous and does not escape antagonism. It can be seen as a “discursive tradition” that produces historically contingent categorizations of doctrine and practice (Asad 1986), framed and crafted by struggles between groups who hold social power (Bayat 2007). Divergent religious interpretations thus upset pre-existing allegiances and orders and in some cases produce severe turmoil. The notion of antagonism between identity groups thus seems well positioned to explore the connections between religion and politics. Indeed, the case of Akkaraipattu foregrounds the continuous group tensions and the juggling and negotiation of discursive boundaries and collective identities, and it is these processes that make the interaction between religion and politics legible.

The fact that people maneuver between positions and manipulate and reproduce boundaries reminds us that antagonism and group identities are not static structures, but subject to agency and shaped by people’s everyday behavior. People navigate the religious field in everyday life. More in line with the sociological perspective taken here, Soares and Osella advocate analyses of the ways in which Muslims “produce themselves as modern religious subjects”, a “self-fashioning” on the basis of a wide range of influences, uncertainties and sources of inspiration (2009, 11). Rather than reducing the religious and the political to each other, or alternatively, declare them incompatible, such an approach investigates how people operate both in the religious and the political field. Similar views can be found in the work of Bayat (2007), whose analysis of Muslim engagement with politics in Egypt and Iran concludes that it is

through “the politics of presence” that people determine a society’s religious and political outlook. He highlights the blending of the public and the private in the way Muslims forge boundaries, adjust practices and engage with politics.

... and in Sri Lanka

Studying the nexus between religion and politics thus requires qualitative and fine-grained empirical analysis and it is to that approach that this article tries to make a contribution. Rather than exploring the religio-political nexus by pinning down the divide between the political and the spiritual, between the secular and the religious, it focuses on the way people continuously define and redefine boundaries and identities. To the extent that such analyses exist in relation to Sri Lanka, they have been applied to Buddhism (e.g. Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988). In his eloquent book, “The colors of the robe”, Ananda Abeysekera proposes “an alternative understanding of religion and politics,” (2002, 80) and ventures to “explore the Sinhala native configurations of narratives about Buddhism and politics, locating arguments and counter-arguments about them.” (2002, 80) The analysis of Sri Lankan Muslims, however, is much less developed.

In fact, it was only very recently that Muslim society emerged as a significant issue area in Sri Lanka. There was some interesting historical (Dewaraja 1994; Mohan 1987) and ethnographic work (McGilvray 1982) pre-dating the violent conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that escalated in the 1980s. A limited number of studies in the 1990s subsequently described the way the conflict transformed Muslim discourses and political practice (Wagner 1990; O’Sullivan 1999; Ismail 1995; Knoerzer 1998). A new wave of studies appeared with the advent of the peace process in 2002. Through the peace talks, political leaders and analysts were reminded of the fact that Sri Lanka’s third ethnic group is deeply entangled – politically, geographically and otherwise – in what was sometimes mistakenly seen as merely a Sinhala-Tamil conflict. The December 2004 tsunami, which affected the Muslim community particularly badly, further boosted the attention for this community (Hasbullah and Korf 2009; Lewer and Ismail 2011). In the ensuing resumption of war, the Sri Lankan government pushed the LTTE out of the Eastern Province in 2006 and declared a countrywide victory in May 2009. Throughout these years, the Muslims played a pivotal role, in terms of political contestation and inter-ethnic relations, particularly in the east of the country, which is ethnically and religiously the most diverse.

Recent publications focus on political dynamics and localized ethnic antagonism (Goodhand and Klem 2005; ICG 2007 and 2008; Ismail 1995; Lewer and Ismail 2011; McGilvray and Raheem 2007; Salman 2008; Uyangoda 2007). Despite occasional activist and political overtones, some of the most insightful and useful work on these issues was produced by Sri Lankan Muslim scholars (Ali 2001; Ameerdeen 2006; Ismail, Abdullah and Fazil 2005; Nuhman 2002; Zackariya and Shanmugaratnam 1997). Coming from a different angle, a much

smaller number of authors have written about important social and religious transformations in the Muslim community, such as new religious practices in relation to ethnic and gender boundaries (Haniffa 2008) or changes in the application of the traditional kudi (matriclan) system (McGilvray 2008; Ruwanpura 2006).

Unlike in most other parts of the world, the Muslims of Sri Lanka adamantly define themselves not just as a religious, but also as an ethnic group. Scholars, however, tend to take a constructivist perspective on ethnicity. In contrast to local perceptions and everyday usage in Sri Lanka, they see it as a cognitively and socially produced category. In his provocative contribution “ethnicity without groups”, Rogers Brubaker argues that ethnic groups “are not things *in* the world, but perspectives *on* the world.” (2004, 44) Such a perspective, tends to encompass “a myth of common ancestry, shared memories, and cultural elements; a link with a historic territory or homeland; and a measure of solidarity” (Smith 1993, 28). In the case of Sri Lanka’s Muslims, this list creates as many questions as it answers. Indeed, the Muslim ethnic label is a somewhat empty category, a product of the struggle against its denial, against the counter image that Muslims are none other than Islamic Tamils (for a discussion see Ismail 1995; McGilvray and Raheem 2007).

The literature on Sri Lankan Muslims tends to analyze “ethnic”, “religious”, and “political” issues separately. This is a major drawback, because it is evident that these categories are strongly inter-related. In fact, the interaction between these three realms plays a leading role in Sri Lanka’s present predicament. Some of the writings produced by the Muslim polity – documents produced by political and civil society leaders (e.g. Mohideen 2006) and more scholarly analyses (e.g. Ali 2001) – conveniently marry the religious and the ethnic sphere to substantiate historic claims, minority rights and political aspirations. Such sources thus fail to scrutinize the tension between the religious and the ethnic sphere. Other scholars in turn adopted this rhetoric rather uncritically. O’Sullivan (1999) for example reviews the rise of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) in the 1990s and connects the ethno-political outlook of the party to its Islamic discourse. She cites SLMC sources on “the Islamic notion that political and religious leadership should not be separated” (1999, 258) and attributes a call for jihad (335) to them, but in my view she misreads party political rhetoric as the ascendancy of Islamist politics. When we move beyond the written documents and political figureheads that she consulted, the presumed convergence of ethnic sentiments, militant politics and religious fundamentalism proves over-simplistic.

O’Sullivan’s account does not stand alone. More widely, the juxtaposition of the terms Islam and armed conflict tends to invoke political and analytical knee-jerk reactions in a post-9/11 world. Implicitly or explicitly, policy makers and analysts have searched for emergent jihadi tendencies in eastern Sri Lanka (see for example ICG 2007). Rumors of frustrated Islamic youth, wahabi influences,

uncanny armed groups, and inter-ethnic tensions have easily blended into compelling stories, but they are typically void of robust empirical evidence. There is thus a need for studies that scrutinize these interactions. This article does so with a place-based study of Akkaraipattu, one among numerous towns along the east coast where the context of war, ethnic tensions, religious revivalism and political contestation collide (and converge) with each other.

THE VIEW FROM AKKARAIPATTU

First time visitors to Akkaraipattu (see map 1–4) will notice the clock tower and the common features of a Sri Lankan rural town: a bustling market, bus stand, shops and local restaurants lined up along the main road, which occasionally gets congested with bullock carts, tractors, a flurry of motorbikes, and school-going children. Travelers passing the town may note the striking difference between the Islamic features of the northern half of the town and the Hindu kovils (temples) and Christian churches in the southern half (see map 4).

The geography of ethnic enclaves that characterizes the east coast manifests itself in the heart of the town: a fairly clear-cut division can be made between the Muslim and the Tamil side. The former is a densely populated (37,000 people) grid of walled alleys and lanes, accentuated by numerous shops and an occasional villa. The southern half houses some 23,000 people and encompasses the cradle of the town – the Pilliyar temple – and the old post office and hospital, schools and government buildings. This side of town has a different, quieter feel to it. Its appearance is greener and more spacious; the numerous traditional Tamil houses – some of which are fairly run-down – are often separated by barbed wire or palm leaf fences, which are cheaper than walls. Both sides of town have their own ethnic “hinterland”: neighboring northern settlements like Addelai-chennai and Nintavur are Muslim, while one finds Tamil settlements (Tampadai, Tambiluvil and Thirukovil) to the south. Further inland, there are Sinhala villages and then Ampara town, the Sinhala dominated capital of the district (map 2 and 3). Scholars with an interest in the region will know Akkaraipattu through Dennis McGilvray’s detailed ethnography of the town (1982; 2008). His primary focus lay with castes and kudis (clans) among the Tamils, but part of his work highlights the deep historic inter-connections with the “Moorish” community as well. Whilst the Muslims do not have castes, their kudi system is largely an extension of the Tamil tradition. The system is matrilineal and matri-local and in both communities it is the key regulatory mechanism for marriage, dowry, and inheritance and thus reproduces socio-economic relations and hierarchies. As elsewhere in Sri Lanka, Islam came to Akkaraipattu through Muslim traders who crossed the Indian Ocean centuries ago, settled and married local (Tamil) women who converted to Islam. Religious practice was shaped by the arrival of a Yemenite sheikh, who established a Sufi tradition (McGilvray

2008). McGilvray's account of social practice provides an exceptionally luxurious basis for understanding a complicated town like Akkaraipattu. Yet, many questions remain unanswered, particularly those concerning recent religious transformations in the Muslim community and the political developments associated with the escalation of violent conflict in the past twenty-five years.

The Tamil militancy, military intervention, ethnic clashes, political strife, breakaway factions and "gunmen" marked Akkaraipattu from the 1980s onwards. As elsewhere in the north and east of the country, recruitment, extortion, assassinations, and intimidation became hallmarks of everyday life. Ethnic discrimination by the state, the language policy, and Sinhala-dominated colonization schemes in the post-independence period raised anxiety among both Tamils and Muslims. Particularly in the east, numerous Muslim youth are said to have joined Tamil militant groups in their struggle against the state in the 1980s. For reasons that were never fully elucidated, however, the Tamil rebels and the Muslims broke apart. Throughout the 1990s, a long sequence of violent incidents occurred between the Tamil and Muslim community, tearing apart the deep historic socio-cultural ties between the two groups. The restoration of "normalcy" announced with the 2002 ceasefire between the government and the LTTE was short-lived. Despite the truce, ethnic tensions, assassinations, extortion and intimidation continued and peaked when a split occurred within the LTTE in March 2004. The December 2004 tsunami further disrupted people's lives. War resumed in 2006 and resulted in a government victory over the LTTE in the east (2007) and the country at large (2009). The period of study was thus rife with uncertainties, tensions and violent incidents.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

The following paragraphs will discuss some of the remarkable changes that have taken place in the ethnic, political and religious realm in the past twenty-five years. The war has had multiple and paradoxical impacts on Akkaraipattu's Muslim community. The following four inter-connected developments form the empirical core of this article: 1) a hardening of ethnic fault lines, 2) the increasingly ethno-territorial meaning attached to Sufism, 3) the attempt to unify the Muslim community through the creation of the Mosque Federation, and 4) the project of Islamic purification propagated by Tabligh Jamaat.

Hardening ethnic fault lines

The eastern coastal belt is known for its long history of interconnections between Tamils and Muslims. This is reflected in cross-group similarities in the kudi system and social organization. Akkaraipattu is one of the few places where a Muslim and a Tamil enclave actually form one town, but the ethnic rift is as manifest in Akkaraipattu as it is throughout the east. Already prior to



Figure 1. Maps of Sri Lanka, the East, Greater Akkaraipattu, Akkaraipattu Town.

the escalation of hostilities, political contestation resulted in an administrative break-up. In the early 1980s, separate divisions were created for the Tamil (Alayadivembu division) and the Muslim (Akkaraipattu division) part of town. This resulted in a tug of war around the exact location of the new boundary, as the ethnic geography and the position of key facilities – the market, the bus stand, the Grand Mosque, the Catholic Church – defied a clear-cut divide.

The escalation of conflict further reinforced the ethnic fault line. In an attempt to establish control, both the Tamil rebels and the state security forces resorted to severe measures. They targeted the two ethnic communities in different ways and thus compounded the Tamil-Muslim rift. The LTTE came to see Muslims as menacing traitors and acted accordingly. The security forces saw the Tamil community as a potential security threat; intimidation, round-ups, arrests, torturous interrogations, killings and disappearances thus affected them particularly badly.

The national conflict often became manifest in Akkaraipattu through more localized struggles. In 1985, a fight between Muslim and Tamil users of the market place got out of hand and the rebels took their revenge on Muslim traders by burning it down. In 1990, ethnic anxiety and contestation over land led Muslims to destroy a Hindu Temple (see the shattered image on the right of map 4). Grenade attacks and sudden escalations of violence have been rife. Carved into the collective local memory, such incidents fortify the division between the two communities. Traditional linkages and inter-personal relations have been under pressure.

The schism between the two communities is aggravated by unequal access to political power and patronage networks. The ability of Muslim political leaders to tap into such networks has borne fruits for the Muslim division, as evidenced by the general state of the infrastructure: the base hospital, roads, a conference hall, and the prestigious Islamic gates at the northern entry of town. The numerous shops, petrol sheds and restaurants are evidence of greater mobility among Muslims. They could cross military checkpoints to do business in Colombo more smoothly than Tamils, though the general trading tradition attributed to the Muslims may be a factor here as well. It would nevertheless be a mistake to single out a Tamil and a Muslim economy. Both are in fact deeply connected: economic exchange between the Tamils and Muslims is highly common in Akkaraipattu. Tamil labor is vital for Muslim construction projects and agriculture. Hiring, selling and buying take place on a daily basis, though it must be added that the Muslim community tends to be the more powerful actor in economic exchange.

The paradoxical combination of ethnically colored conflict and economic inter-dependence drives the pulse of life in Akkaraipattu. The situation oscillates between sudden eruptions of tension and violence and subsequent resumptions of “normalcy” through trade, agriculture, school and so on. Community leaders as well as workers and traders on both sides of the divide agree that economic

interests are a driving force in ending temporal crises. The common cadence tends to encompass general tensions, a violent incident and possibly a reprisal, which in turn result in a public shut down (*hartal*) imposed by either side. Whilst efforts are made to defuse the crisis, people in both communities – employees, employers, sellers, consumers – are eager to continue their everyday struggle for income and the situation gradually returns to square one. Neither side can afford to let enmity get in the way for more than a few days.

The reinvigorated genealogy of Sufi shrines

Wet rice has historically formed the heart of Akkaraipattu's economy. The irrigated rice fields surrounding the town are subject to increasing competition due to population growth and ethno-political boundaries. This has resulted in local conflicts, which were further complicated by the context of state sponsored land colonization, ethnic contestation, guerrilla warfare, and tsunami relocation. Land, in fact, became a conjunction of economic interests, ethnic anxieties, and genealogical claims. The shrine at Ambalattaru forms an interesting example.

The mosque was erected in a rather remote location some 17 kilometers southwest of town (see map 3). There are contesting accounts of the date of erection. Some claim it dates back to the 17th Century, but the more plausible account that came out of McGilvray's work (private communication) suggests the shrine was built in the early 1950s when the jungle was cleared for the Gal Oya irrigation scheme. Legend has it that the earth-moving equipment froze up and the previously unknown saint Sikander emerged in a dream to explain he had been buried in the forest for centuries. The mosque was thus built to appease him with a saint tomb. There is a long history of Sri Lankan Muslims worshipping such tombs inside mosques to make vows and ask for help with their problems. Whilst the rituals and symbols are Islamic, shrines like this have attracted Hindus and Christians as well (McGilvray 2008, 273–275).

The location of the Ambalattaru mosque bestowed it with special importance. What used to be a peripheral jungle later became a controversial ethnic borderland. The shrine became the marker of a fault line that not only defined claims on farmland, but an ethnic space and a historic right to inhabit that space as well. It lies on the very edge of the paddy fields, on the verge between the Muslim and Tamil dominated coastline and the Sinhala dominated inland. Beyond the mosque, one finds jungle on one side and the Sinhala settlements created under the Gal Oya irrigation scheme on the other. Poor Sinhala farmers from the south were brought in to exploit the newly gained agricultural potential. As elsewhere in the north and east, these developments invoked Tamil and Muslim anxieties about Sinhala encroachment (McGilvray 2008; Moore 1985). This led the Muslim leadership to attract new Muslim farmers to the area. They were brought in all the way from Welimade (a Sinhala speaking area in Sri Lanka's central highlands). Apparently, the political compromise at the

time required the new settlers to speak Sinhala. Ambalattaru was given a Sinhalaized name: Ambalam Oya.

With time, the mosque started to decay, but when ethno-political contestation flared up again in the 1980s and 1990s, it resurfaced on the political radar. A local Muslim politician renovated the building and SLMC leader Ashraff provided electricity. The mosque thus experienced a rebirth, which had little to do with religious dynamics, but everything with the land politics of the time. Every morning there is a vow-making ceremony and pilgrims come from all across the east coast to pray and ask for help. Over 10,000 attend the annual festival, dignitaries at the mosque told me, and they bring cows and other offerings. Sufi followers in Ambalattaru and other Sufi shrines in the region, voiced anxiety during interviews that more puritan Muslim reform movements (mainly Tawhid Jamaat) oppose these traditions and heritages. But in the east of Sri Lanka, Muslims have to cling on to their history, they explained, because they are under threat from Sinhala and Tamil nationalists, who argue that Muslims are not from this soil. Shrines like the one in Ambalattaru are pivotal for the Muslims' sense of belonging and they play a vital role in contemporary interpretations of "ancient" history.

The mosque thus assumed new significance in the region's ethno-political field. Genealogy, belonging and the historical nexus between place and religion became paramount for a minority community that perceives itself as "under siege". Rather than a mere prayer house, the mosque provides meaning to contemporary notions of place and belonging, a boundary between "us" and "them". It became a marker of a discourse that implicitly emanates notions like "traditional homeland" and "sons of the soil", both dominant features of Tamil and Sinhala nationalism.

The mosque federation

Apart from transforming the symbolic and territorial meaning attached to mosques, the conflict has also affected the role of mosque organizations in society. Mirroring the institutional setup of Hindu temples, mosques have long been administered by kudi-based trustee boards. Until the 1980s the role of these boards was mostly confined to the religious realm and its wider worldly significance was declining. This becomes clear from McGilvray's work (2008, 275–279) as well as interviews with one of the former chairmen of the federation and other Muslim leaders. Board members were selected from the mosque-affiliated kudis to settle disputes within the mosque constituency and run mosque affairs, like maintenance and religious festivals. In response to the insecurity and ethnic tensions, that role has changed in a major way.

Akkaraipatttu's three main mosques jointly founded a federation in 1983 to oversee social activities and facilitate the implementation of shariah law. Neighboring towns followed suit with similar bodies. Soon after, in 1985, the first ethnic clashes caused havoc in Akkaraipatttu and the Muslim community felt an urgent

need to get organized. People expected the Islamic leaders to settle inter-ethnic problems and disputes on their behalf. In the following fifteen years, the federation became strongly preoccupied with preserving the unity and safety of the Muslim community.

The 2002 peace talks between the government and the LTTE further intensified this role. Instigated riots, high profile killings, extortions and disappearances ravaged the region as the LTTE, the army and Muslim politicians competed for control in the shadow of the formal negotiations about the region's political future. The following incident is illustrative of the federation's capacity to settle such unruly situations. During a Friday morning prayer in November 2005, a volatile period because of the presidential elections at the time, Tamil rebels threw a grenade into the praying crowd at the Grand Mosque, killing eight and wounding some thirty-five Muslims. The mosque lies right on the ethnic fault line. The rebels quickly made their way out, leaving behind a shocked and furious Muslim crowd, which was ready to take revenge on the Tamil part of town. Sri Lanka's history is rife with ethnic riots, even pogroms, sparked by incidents like this. In this particular case, however, the escalation of violence was prevented, because the religious leaders stepped in. The maulavi preaching in the mosque when the grenade exploded told me he addressed the crowd, saying: "please behave like real human beings. Don't do any harm to anyone." He said this through the mosque loudspeakers immediately after the incident. They turned the volume up, so even in the Tamil area it could be heard. Meanwhile, the police moved in with armored cars and all the troops they could spare. Muslim leaders continued to talk to the crowd saying: "don't go harm anyone. This is the result of madness. Don't go hurt the Tamils. [...] Allah will take care of it, you go home." The maulavis were successful and an outright ethnic clash was averted (see also Goodhand et al. 2009).

Islamization and Tabligh Jamaat

In parallel to the war-related developments discussed above, remarkable changes occurred in the religious sphere. In the past three decades, the number of mosques has increased rapidly and the practice of alms giving has been formalized in a Zakat foundation. Public displays of Islam – dress, haircut, beard – have changed as well. More pious inhabitants of the town prided themselves in pointing out that an increasing number of men shave their heads and grow their beards. Some women have started to wear a black niqab that fully covers their face (though this is not as common as in some other towns in the east, most notably Kattankudy). This Islamization process was mainly spearheaded by Tabligh Jamaat, an Islamic reform movement. It was founded by the Indian Islamic scholar Muhammad Ilyas in the 1920s to call on Muslims to bring their everyday life in line with Islam. The credo of the movement can be summarized in his quote "O Muslims, become Muslims". Whilst relatively little has been written about Tabligh, they have

become a big player, certainly in South Asia, but also globally (Ahmad 1991; Metcalf 1982; Robinson 2007; Sikand 2007). The movement spread along Sri Lanka's east coast and to Akkaraipattu in the 1970s. Other groups – Jamaat-i-Islami and Tawhid Jamaat – came to the town as well, but their presence remains small. In many mosques and in the mosque federation Tabligh Jamaat has a strong presence and presently they are building a large dedicated Tabligh mosque along the main road.

Tablighis aim to “purify” Islam from “undesirable” customs that Islam has blended with during the centuries of its expansion. Sufi practices like mysticism, meditation and saint worship are tolerated as an advanced form of Islam, but they are not encouraged. Tablighis see themselves as a *da'wa* movement, that is they educate the rural masses and disentangle them from “un-Islamic” habits (Robinson 2007; Sikand 2007). During my fieldwork Tablighis proudly presented their teachings as “simple”, as a way of life that anyone can adopt. They shun theological debate and interpret purification in terms of doing everyday things – eating, praying, dressing and so on – in an Islamic way (see also Ahmad 1991; Metcalf 1982). All can reach the afterlife by following this very simple path, according to their belief.

Tabligh Jamaat is horizontally organized and claims not to have elaborate financial or institutional structures. Members are not recorded and for this reason it is hard to estimate the size of Tabligh's following, but one Tablighi estimated the number of active members in Akkaraipattu at one thousand at the time of research. “Jamaat visits” form the core of its activity: members of the movement travel to other places (neighboring villages or abroad) for some days, weeks or months for devotional practice and spreading the word to other Muslims. These visits take place on a regular basis, often by men, but in some cases women are brought along as well.

I have not been able to reconstruct how exactly Tabligh Jamaat entered Akkaraipattu, but Victor de Munck's analysis (1998) of the arrival of the movement in a village in Moneragala District, further south, provides a plausible illustration. Interestingly, the non-Tablighi villagers De Munck describes acknowledged that their white-clad, bearded visitors propagate the proper Islam, but they avoided interaction with them, sighed with relief when they survived the visit without being converted and made inappropriate jokes about them at the local store afterwards. They thus averted absorption into the movement, but did not challenge the Tablighi concept of purity. This purification concept is the leading theme for those who did join the movement as well. One member I interviewed in Akkaraipattu said the following: “Before I joined Tabligh, I had no life. I didn't go to the mosque and I didn't obey my parents. [...] Before, I thought my life was spoilt. I joined Tabligh because I felt I needed to correct my life. Go the path of Allah.”

Remarkably, the Tabligh purification project steers clear of ethnicity altogether. They actively try to shut out key planks in above-discussed Sufi

discourse of genealogy and a local sense of belonging, and the inter-ethnic dimension escapes their narratives. Tabligh is all about Muslim identity, but the movement explicitly disconnects itself from worldly matters like identity politics and ethnic strife, because they are seen as impure, inherently divisive, and a source of trouble. “We don’t worry about politics, shariah, or an Islamic state,” one member said. Another added: “I don’t believe we can decide by politics. God is the decision maker. Politicians can’t decide over the life of the people.” Politics were the cause of Sri Lanka’s “ethnic problem”, and they will not help resolve it. “The solution will come if the Muslims obey the word of Allah. With politics, one problem is solved and another one will come.”

Divergent Muslim identities, demarcations and notions of purity

As becomes clear from the above developments, the war and the hardening of ethnic fault lines have had great impact in Akkaraipattu. That impact goes beyond a simple us/them divide, however. It is not just a story of violence and the mobilization of identity leading to a segregation of Muslims from Tamils and in turn a unification of Muslims around Islam. The religious field harbors multiple trajectories. We have witnessed how a Sufi shrine became an ethno-territorial marker in the politics of place, a mosque federation that expanded its role to deal with violence and contention, and an Islamic purification project (Tabligh Jamaat) that steers clear from ethnicity and politics. These developments all pivot around an increased awareness of identity. Indeed, it matters a whole lot more to be Muslim now that this category determines friend/foe relationships and security conditions. Islamic institutions are thus preoccupied with demarcating Muslim from non-Muslim, but they define “Muslimness” in rather different ways.

In the case of the Ambalattaru shrine, Muslimness airs ethnic genealogy and territorial belonging. For Tabligh Jamaat, on the other hand, the category Muslim denotes a sense of religious purity. It is a deliberate move away from territory and genealogy; Islamization is about shedding those un-Islamic influences. Tabligh Jamaat’s discourse is about the global *umma*; divisions along lines of nationality and ethnicity are secondary. The mosque federation, on the other hand, has an explicitly local focus. It is about uniting the community and shutting out divisive influences and external threats.

One important distinction concerns the relation of these discourses and institutions to “the political”, which brings us to the next step in this paper: the paradoxical relations between religion and politics. The case of Akkaraipattu flags divergent connections. The mosque federation constitutes the expansion of a previously merely religious body into a broader scope of public action. It tries to address politically charged problems by uniting the community and by mobilizing political leaders. The Ambalattaru Sufi shrine, on the other hand, sheds a rather different light on the political connection. Politicians funded the refurbishment of the mosque to bolster their image as good Muslim patrons and thus

reach out to relevant vote banks. Tabligh, thirdly, claims to be neither about patronage, nor about principled politics. They stay out of politics altogether, because it is a divisive factor that generates problems rather than resolving them, members of the movement would not get tired of saying. Somewhat schematically, we could thus distinguish principled politics (concerned with the rights and anxieties of a population group), pragmatic politics (pivoting around patronage) and anti-politics (attempts to turn away from politics at large). Whilst such firm discursive positions are important to understand, readers will not be surprised to find people circumventing principles or jockeying between discourses in the section below. As Akkaraipattu oscillates between escalations of violence and resumptions of relative peace, different outlooks and boundaries are activated and de-activated. The religious field conditions people's possibilities, but does not script their behavior altogether.

RELIGION, POLITICS AND PATRONAGE

Let me shortly change perspective here and look at the role of politicians.⁶ The unruliness of the electorate and the dialectic between principled and pragmatic politics are a challenge for them. To understand their position, we need to take the broader narrative of modern Muslim politics in Sri Lanka on board. Even a nutshell summary sketches the dynamics quite clearly. Pragmatism was the dominant feature of Muslim politics up to the mid-1980s. Muslim politicians tended to engage in what O'Sullivan (1999) has labeled "the politics of access": they managed to deliver patronage to their electorates by adopting a non-militant stance within the two mainstream (Sinhala dominated) parties. In Akkaraipattu, Uthama Lebbe was a prominent example of this approach. During the 1980s, a more militant discourse of Muslim ethno-nationalism and minority rights emerged. This was manifest in the creation of the Muslim United Liberation Front (MULF), founded by Akkaraipattu's activist M.I.M. Mohideen, and its more successful parallel: the SLMC, run by M.H. M. Ashraff (from Kalmunai). Both parties propagated Muslim rights and a form of self-determination, thus partly mirroring Tamil nationalism. However, the MULF never became a powerful player and the SLMC only survived because its ethno-nationalist ambitions were trumped by *realpolitik*. Despite its Islamic outlook and presentation, it joined Sinhala-led administrations from opposite sides of the political spectrum to secure ministerial posts. Politics of access thus continued – be it with a shift of patronage towards east Sri Lanka. The ethno-political rhetoric of the SLMC could have potentially united the Muslim community under one banner, but its patronage

⁶In addition to interviews in Akkaraipattu, this section draws from discussions with Muslim politicians and analysts throughout the country throughout recent years.

politics had the opposite effect. Town-based patrimonial networks of individual “big men”, like A.L.M. Athaulla in Akkaraipattu, divided the party. After the death of Ashraff in 2000, these politicians competed for ministerial posts, either on an SLMC ticket or with their own electoral vehicles.

Politicians like Athaulla have to juggle. Being too militant would bar their access to key positions, but they cannot be unresponsive to the various pressures from their constituency either. To garner support, they must navigate the divisions within that constituency. How to engage with the ethnic geography of a Sufi shrine without antagonizing Tablighis? Overly outspoken ideologies – Islamism, ethno-nationalism – create difficulties for them, because they divide their vote banks or impede their ability to join government. Instead the tendency is to make oneself unassailable as the town patron by monopolizing patronage. The engagement with religion therefore tends to centre not on political issues, but on symbolism – funding mosques, constructing religious landmarks, and fraternizing with respected religious leaders. The message of the two big Islamic entry gates spanning the main road and the modern conference centre (see map 4) will not be lost on a visitor entering Akkaraipattu: this is the town of A.L.M. Athaulla (his name and picture are clearly posted), he is a good Muslim and he is making Akkaraipattu prosperous. At the 2008 Provincial Council elections, he assembled mosque leaders and the mosque federation and told them whom the people should vote for. The patrimonial logic thus connects religion and politics in a marriage of convenience. It does not engage in theological debate or setting religiously inspired political objectives. Big men engage with religion through symbols, people and institutions to connect to their clientele.

THE POLITICAL, POLITICS AND ANTI-POLITICS IN PRACTICE

The view from below highlights similar difficulties in balancing contradictory loyalties. The community and religious leadership in Akkaraipattu use both political and anti-political behavior in their everyday struggle for survival. On one hand they have to do politics, to deal with immediate crises, as the grenade incident at the Grand Mosque illustrated, but also on a personal level: to safeguard jobs and personal favors. On the other hand, people in Akkaraipattu have plenty of reason to turn away from politics. Not only because they see politics as abject and impure, but also because it tends to endanger everyday security and survival. As usual, there are important differences in Akkaraipattu between what people say they do and what they actually do, particularly in relation to something inherently controversial like politics. People air discourses about politics or anti-politics, but in fact they practice both. The paragraphs below discuss some examples of how people negotiate the various discursive contradictions and limitations.

Let me start with the testimony of a senior civil servant who has previously enjoyed influential positions in Akkaraipattu's religious establishment. Religious leaders will present themselves as pious and non-political, he explained, but at election time, their mosques and constituencies become political currency and they cannot resist the pressure. Politicians will use them to marshal support and if they object, they will face problems. "It may not be right, but we think like this. We need a job for our son, so we go to the minister. That's how elections work here. To get Samurdhi [government support for the poor], a loan, anything, you go through the minister. He calls me in the office 'do this, do that' and makes me contravene our own policy and break the law. But he says: 'I'll look after it. You must do it. What are you telling.'" Political power thus trumps anti-political conviction when push comes to shove on a personal level. He continued: "Even people who follow Tabligh and Tawhid need personal favors. To the outside they are anti-political, but inside it's different. I have also called friends to tell them do this and that. Violence is also used. Even the police and army would come in for certain purposes."

A second example concerns the personal struggle that a senior member of Tabligh Jamaat shared with me. He is one of the members of the movement who is particularly insistent with regard to piety. As an educated person, he will eloquently explain why politics will not lead to anything. One day, SLMC leader Ashraff sent two people to invite him to speak at a political meeting. He explained his position, but they suggested he should speak about the need for Muslim unity, a message he could not disagree with. He could not withstand their pressure, but, he added, "I spoke only about God. Not about politics." While this Tabligh leader upheld his personal boundary, he became part of a political event and his participation will have boosted its political symbolism and legitimacy.

The Mosque Federation, a third example, is itself a manifestation of contradictions. It sees itself as a religious organization that contrasts itself with the polity (like the Tablighis), but it also constitutes a response to the ethnic violence in the 1980s and its narrative emanates locality, belonging and ethnic geography (like the Ambalattaru shrine). In addition, the federation engaged with formal politics as it tried to optimize the vote by uniting the Muslims in elections. This, however, proved to be beyond their capacity; other forces trying to influence voting behavior proved stronger. Then, the federation attempted with increasing vigor to influence the course of Muslim political leaders. As the war progressed, the federation joined hands with other mosque federations, first at district and later at provincial level, to advocate Muslim aspirations. With the 2002 peace process, Muslim anxieties peaked as their political future was debated in the absence of a Muslim delegation. Popular declarations were launched in Muthur and at the university campus in Oluvil (near Ninthavur) (map 2) to propagate the Muslim rights to ethnic self-determination and demand that Muslim political leaders defend such a position. The mosque federation was one of the forces behind

these statements. In addition, they set up meetings with various Muslim politicians, calling on them to overcome their differences and reunite in one Muslim front, but this failed. The Muslim polity remains divided and no separate delegation was added to the peace talks (which had started to collapse anyway). The Mosque Federation thus spans principled, pragmatic and anti-politics. It tries to deal with the political in an anti-political way by keeping the distorting and divisive influence of politics out (for example during the mosque incident), but meanwhile it attempts to influence politics, by calling on politicians to engage with the political in a more responsible way (lobby during the peace process).⁷

CONCLUSION

This article contributes to the wider literature on contemporary Islam and politics that takes issue with dominant concepts like secularism and Islamism and the debate about Islam's relation to modernity and liberal democracy. These writings debunk the idea that any political system is essential to Islam and posit that more contextualized and nuanced approaches are needed to understand the variegated interface between Islam and politics. So far, this literature has remained largely disconnected from Sri Lankan studies. Whilst Sri Lankan Muslims have become a somewhat fashionable topic in recent years, there is a tendency to either deal with the religious and the political angle separately, or subsume one into the other. This article has shown that the dynamic between the religious and the political is much less straightforward and in fact harbors a number of paradoxes. Identity issues have assumed an omnipresent importance in course of the war in Sri Lanka: it matters a whole lot more to be or not to be Muslim now that it defines friend and foe, ethnic geographies and everyday security. However, the meanings attached to that category – Muslim – vary and this leads to paradoxical differences of emphasis: the ethnic dimension versus the religious one, local versus global, political versus anti-political and so on. Salient examples presented in this article included the discourse around the Ambalattaru Sufi shrine, which thrives on Muslim genealogy and the need to preserve the purity of a historical Muslim place under threat of Sinhala encroachment. Tabligh Jamaat followers on the other hand define purity in terms of

⁷My colleague, Hasbullah, informed me about a tantalizing fourth example that unfolded while this article was being prepared for print. Cegu Issadeen, Akkaraipattu's second-most influential politician and Athaulla's main competitor, abruptly left politics and became a Sufi leader. He started his own "ashram" and quickly became an enchanted religious figure. His meditation centre – a scenic site just outside the town with a shrine, a cave, and a stage for open-air sermons – attracts a large audience, from Akkaraipattu or further afield, both Muslims and some Tamils. They come for worship and devotion, but the site has also become popular for family visits and picnics and the ashram has started to issue entrance tickets. Issadeen's remarkable move from politics to religion shows just how thin the apparent opposition between the two realms can be.

Islamization and see ethnic sentiments and local politics as worldly digressions. Coming from a different angle, the Muslim *ethno*-nationalist discourse steers clear from religion, which in turn poses a challenge for Muslim politicians, who engage with Islamic leaders and symbols rather superficially and opportunistically. Meanwhile the mosque federation present themselves as apolitical, but when they try to orchestrate community behavior (by preventing pogroms or trying to unify the vote) they enter a highly political domain. In all these cases, the Muslim identity is pivotal, but the resulting religio-political connections or disconnections diverge.

This observation matters, because it helps explain some of the divisions within Sri Lanka's Muslim community at large. It helps resolve the puzzle of a group of people that often fails to unite around shared interests to jointly face common enemies, despite facing major existential threats: from the state and from the rebels, from Sinhalese and Tamils, from Christians and Buddhists. Furthermore, it counters implicit and explicit prophecies of imminent Muslim "jihad" violence by wahabi-inspired groups. Instead, this article highlights the internal cleavages of identity politics: the war has united *and* divided the Muslims. It moves beyond a dichotomy of "radical" and "moderate" Muslims and the question of who is going to emerge on top. Rather than a struggle between dissatisfied armed youth falling pray to fundamentalism on one hand and liberal peaceful cosmopolitan Muslims on the other, we witness a much wider variety of discourses propagating divergent ethnic, religious and political sentiments. And as a result there are intra-Muslim fissures, contradictory political outlooks, paradoxical notions of purity and different ways of defining ingroup and outgroup. Rather than a dichotomy of two fronts (be they labeled as traditional/modern, radical/moderate, piety/politics, or fundamentalist/secular), people position themselves in different ways as they navigate their everyday life in a context that oscillates between violent skirmishes and periods of relative peace. They employ different discourses to engage or disengage with politics and if their principles do not suit the situation, they find pragmatic ways to circumvent them. What is deeply political at one instance may re-appear as pious the next, depending on the occasion.

As a result of these convolutions, the religious field cannot simply be singled out. Far from a privileged spiritual arena, it is structured by incidents of violence, patrimonial loyalties, political contestation, and ethnic identity issues. Muslim identities are not merely a function of religious dogma, but result from continuous reproduction through social relations, religious traditions and reform movements, economic activities, violence and political dynamics. This article thus supports the emphasis of recent studies on the ways contemporary Muslims produce themselves in their everyday life (Bayat 2007; Soares and Osella 2009). That does not mean, however that the religious field is entirely contingent, or that no overall trends can be identified. Important changes are taking place: Islamization, a hardening of ethnic fault lines, the soaring importance of locality and genealogy, and the context of protracted insecurity. These changes bear

testimony to the fact that the religious field is influenced by various factors. Armed conflict, ethno-nationalism, and the proliferation of trans-national movements like Tablighi all had an impact on the way religion and politics interact, but this impact was neither homogeneous nor hegemonic. Violence and ethnic contestation have raised the stakes, but this applies both to political and to anti-political behavior. To return to the metaphor of Muslim prayer on a ferry cited at the inception of this article, religion does not remain unaffected when it enters new terrain. The current, wind, and the waves exert force, but their influences are not uniform; they may work with or against each other. War, ethnicity and Islamic revival movements raise questions of orientation, identity and boundaries, but rather than clear answers, we find multiple trajectories and divergent individual ways of navigating the prevalent conditions.

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Article 2

"Showing one's colours: The political work of elections in post-war Sri Lanka", submitted to *Modern Asian Studies*.

Showing one's colours

The political work of elections in post-war Sri Lanka

Abstract

This paper analyses Sri Lanka's parliamentary elections in April 2010 as they played out in small Muslim pockets on the east coast. The political work of elections, the narrative endorses, involves a lot more than the composition of government. Antagonism over group identities and boundaries are at central stage. Elections force people to show their colours and this causes turbulence, because they grapple with several, possibly contradictory loyalties. The paper argues that elections bring together different political storylines, rather than one master antagonism. It is the interaction between different narratives that paradoxically provides elections both with a sense of gravity and dignity, and with the lingering threat of rupture and disturbance.

Introduction

This paper analyses the evolvment of the 2010 parliamentary elections in Trincomalee, a peripheral district on Sri Lanka's east coast. It conceptualizes elections as a powerful political moment of ritual and spectacle in which more fundamental societal narratives converge and collide. By exploring the politics of a particular community (Sri Lanka's second largest minority: the Muslims), at a particular time (the immediate post-war context) the paper foregrounds the dynamics of crafting group boundaries, moral communities, and vertical loyalties. And it argues that it is these contentions that account for the state of excitement, the intrigue, and the sense of anxiety that elections tend to bring along.

The political work that elections do reaches well beyond the electoral moment itself. Elections do not just bring about a new composition of parliament. They involve the active crafting, activating and rearranging of political identities. This conceptualization emerges from a set of recent ethnographic forays into democratic politics. Though we are far removed from a consolidated field of study, several authors have produced exciting conceptual angles and empirical narratives on electoral contestation.¹ My main point of reference, however, lies with Jonathan

¹ M. Banerjee, 'Democracy, Sacred and Everyday: An Ethnographic Case from India', in *Democracy: Anthropological Perspectives*, J. Paley (ed.), School of Advanced Research Press, Santa

Spencer's work on politics, violence and the state in South Asia.² Steering clear of the cold arithmetic that often characterizes electoral studies, Spencer posits elections are 'moral dramas of identity and difference'.³ They produce and reproduce antagonistic political identities, thus activating boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. They dramatize citizenship and thus reify people's relation to the state and their membership of the nation, but they also expose divisions, thus opening a register of disturbance and transgression.

My emphasis on antagonism and identity politics does not imply that more rational or interest-based dimensions of politics – be it consensus-seeking or clientelism – are irrelevant. But, to adopt the phrasing of Harriss, Stokke and Törnquist, there is a need to 'politicise' our understanding of democracy.⁴ A purely interest-based or functionalist understanding of politics, Banerjee adds, is a little 'threadbare'.⁵ Such an understanding is poorly positioned to engage with the powerful performative and carnivalesque dimensions of politics. Putting political identities and antagonism at the heart of our analysis helps explain why people invest so much energy in politics, even when they have little to expect from their politicians. And it brings forward that South Asia's more troubling forms of contestation – ranging from election violence to communal riots, pogroms and even war – are not altogether antithetical to democratic politics, but closely related to it.

These explorations in political anthropology resonate with the case discussed in this paper. Political identity issues featured saliently in Sri Lanka's 2010 parliamentary elections. The polls provided an occasion for people to define themselves in relation to others (us and them) and in relation to the state (citizens of a democratic nation). The importance of group boundaries may seem straightforward in

Fe, 2008, pp. 63–95; M. Banerjee, 'Elections as Communitas'. *Social research*, 78: Spring 2011, 75–98; W. Berenschot, *Riot Politics: Hindu-Muslim Violence and the India State*, Hurst, London, 2011; R. Bertrand, J.-L. Briquet and P. Pels (eds), *Cultures of Voting: The Hidden History of the Secret Ballot*, Hurst, London, 2007; J. Cupples, 'Rethinking Electoral Geography: Spaces and Practices of Democracy in Nicaragua'. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, NS 34, 2009, pp. 110–124; J. Paley (ed.), *Democracy: Anthropological Perspectives*, School of Advanced Research Press, Santa Fe, 2008.

² J. Spencer, 'A Nation "Living in Different Places": Notes on the Impossible Work of Purification in Postcolonial Sri Lanka'. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 37:1, 2003, pp. 1–23; J. Spencer, *Anthropology, Politics and the State: Democracy and Violence in South Asia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007; J. Spencer, 'A Nationalism without Politics? The Illiberal Consequences of Liberal Institutions in Sri Lanka'. *Third World Quarterly*, 29:3, 2008, pp. 611–629.

³ Spencer, op. cit., *Anthropology, Politics and the State*, p. 78.

⁴ J. Harriss, K. Stokke, and O. Törnquist (eds), *Politicising Democracy: The New Local Politics of Democratisation*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2004.

⁵ Banerjee, op. cit., 'Democracy, sacred, and everyday', p. 73.

the Sri Lankan context. Given that the island just emerged from nearly three decades of armed separatist conflict fought along ethno-political lines, one would be surprised *not* to find a measure of antagonism between Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims during the first post-war elections. While these lines of content indeed play a salient role, the paper argues ethnic othering is only part of the story. There are several other forms of antagonism and political identifications, driven by personal ties, town-based rivalries, and the enactment of national citizenship. People belong to more than one ‘us’ in relation to more than one ‘them’, and there is a substantial amount of reshuffling in terms of which ‘friends’ will engage which ‘foes’. The force field between different political loyalties and antagonisms stands at the core of the electoral dynamics I encountered. Elections temporarily intensify interactions between the nation, different group identities, and the individual. This accounts for elections’ sense of gravity. The casting of an individual opinion becomes an act of citizenship. And it accounts for the fear of rupture that elections bring along. People need to show their colours, but they cannot satisfy all loyalties with only one vote.

This paper provides a detailed account of election time among Trincomalee’s Muslim community, but in doing so, it makes a more fundamental point about the complexity of political landscapes, and the need to take multiple political identities seriously. The powerful role of such identities – be they based on religion, ethnicity, caste, place, nationality or otherwise – is acknowledged in work on Sri Lankan politics⁶, and more widely in the literature on South Asia, a region troubled by exclusivist ideologies like Hindutva and communal riots⁷, caste politics⁸, and separatist struggles.⁹ This paper seeks to complement the scholarly record on political

⁶ J. Uyangoda, ‘Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Imagination and Democratic Alternatives for Sri Lanka’. *Futures*, 37, 2005, pp. 959–988; R. Venugopal, *Cosmopolitan Capitalism and Sectarian Socialism: Conflict, Development, and the Liberal Peace in Sri Lanka*, PhD dissertation, Oxford University, Oxford, 2009; N. Wickremesinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age. A history of contested identities*, Hurst, London, 2006.

⁷ W. Berenschot, *Riot Politics: Hindu-Muslim Violence and the India State*, Hurst, London, 2011; P. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2003; T. Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and identity in Postcolonial Bombay*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2001; H. Spodek, ‘In the Hindutva Laboratory: Pogroms and Politics in Gujarat, 2002’. *Modern Asian Studies*, 44:2, 2010, pp. 349–399; S. Tambiah, ‘Urban Riots and Cricket in South Asia: A Postscript to “Leveling Crowds”’. *Modern Asian Studies*, 39:4, 2005, pp. 97–927; S. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004.

⁸ A. Doron, ‘Caste Away? Subaltern Engagement With the Modern Indian State’. *Modern Asian Studies*, 44:4, 2010, pp. 753–783; D. Roy, ‘Caste and power: An Ethnography In West Bengal, India’. *Modern Asian Studies*. First View, 2011.

⁹ Among others, see Spencer, op. cit., *Anthropology, politics and the state*.

contestation in South Asia by foregrounding the *interaction* between different identity struggles. Rather than one ‘master antagonism’, it is the contradictions between different kinds of us-them conceptions that shapes ‘the political’, certainly in Trincomalee, but expectably in many parts of South Asia. A lot of political effort gets invested in arranging the different forms of antagonism, in (re-)enacting identities and (de-)activating boundaries, and it is that kind of work that elections do.

Preceded by a brief conceptual and contextual background, the core of this paper comprises a chronological account of the elections in Trincomalee’s Muslim pockets. The fieldwork underpinning this paper was done in the period January to May 2010, but builds on a longer-term engagement with eastern Sri Lanka and more or less annual field visits over the past decade.¹⁰

The political work of elections: defining ourselves, our others and the state

Spencer’s inciting exploration of ‘political modernity’ in South Asia¹¹ navigates a sprawling diversity of empirical contexts and intellectual terrains. He weaves together a broad thematic canvas – traversing questions of democracy and secularism; citizenship, nationalism and the nation-state; war and peace – with reflections on ‘the political’. Spencer is indebted here to scholarly proponents of ‘radical democracy’ who revisit the intellectual legacy of the German political theorist Carl Schmitt to argue that a deliberational and consensus-oriented understanding of democracy overlooks the very essence of politics.¹² Adversarial positions are not just the result of clashing interests (which could be addressed with rational problem-solving), they are at the heart of what politics is. Antagonism between us and them, so the argument goes, is constitutive of politics. This takes us beyond the space of formal politics and directs us to more existential and morally charged questions around how people define themselves politically.

Debates on ‘the political’ have strong European antecedents, but Spencer posits that the central idea has great purchase on political contestation in South Asia. This

¹⁰ The fieldwork in 2010 comprised 136 interviews (in English or with translation), observations of election rallies, speeches and so-called pocket meetings, perusal of (English language) newspapers and archival research on Trincomalee’s electoral history (by Ajiwadeen).

¹¹ Spencer, op. cit., *Anthropology, politics and the state*, p. 3.

¹² This is not the place to do justice to these debates, but common references include: E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Verso, London, 1985; C. Mouffe, *On the Political*, Routledge, London, 2005.

becomes particularly clear in his discussion of electoral politics – ‘dramas of identity and difference’ – with which I engage in this paper. Importantly, political identities are not merely expressed through elections; they are enacted through them.¹³ Election time involves hard political work, to reify identities, to perform registers of loyalty and belonging, and to activate (or de-activate) social boundaries. It is these processes that make elections such a turbulent and potentially disturbing phenomenon. In Spencer’s words, ‘the carnivalesque space of the political is a space of possibility and licence: licence to argue, and licence to joke, and licence to experiment with challenges to the order of things. It is, for this reason, also a space of danger, anxiety, and concern.’¹⁴

Whilst Spencer leaves this somewhat implicit, such an interpretation requires us to depart from the rigid dichotomies put forward by proponents of radical democracy, who emphasize the antagonism along the received political spectrum of left and right. There are several kinds of us and several kinds of them. It is in fact a common theme in Sri Lankan politics, and elsewhere in South Asia, that the politics of caste, class, ethnicity, religion, ideology, and regional disparity – to name the most salient examples – often produce different kinds of cleavages. In Sri Lanka, the common wisdom is that ethnicity trumped class, caste and region and partly because of that the island got tangled up in an ethno-secessionist war. Yet, the other identities, boundaries, and political antagonisms have clearly not disappeared.¹⁵ Contestation along other-than-ethnic lines severely complicates the political picture, and – importantly – this does not only cause academic brain-racking; it is in fact an acute challenge for voters too. As will become clear from the empirical narrative, the tensions between different forms of antagonism are not ancillary to politics. They are central to the political dynamics around elections, because they accounts for the volatility and the fear of rupture that the polls bring along.

This bringing together of different identities has another effect: elections dramatize the bond between citizens and their state. Rather than rupture, anxiety and spectacle, this invests elections with ritual qualities. It provides electoral performance with a sense of gravity. Villages suddenly matter to the nation. Famous, powerful people act out their bonds with the community. People’s individual vote becomes an

¹³ Spencer, op. cit., *Anthropology, politics and the state*, p. 76-78.

¹⁴ Spencer, op. cit., *Anthropology, politics and the state*, p. 94.

¹⁵ Venugopal, op. cit.; Wickremesinghe, op. cit.

act of citizenship, which some of them take on as a duty with near religious proportions. In this connection, Mukulika Banerjee coins the term ‘sacred elections’ in her ethnography of elections in West Bengal, India.¹⁶ Seen from such a ritual perspective, electoral performance not only bestows voters with an aura of prominence; it also affirms the legitimacy of the political system.¹⁷ Elections, in other words, can also be understood as a form of subjectivation. They turn people into registered voters, and thus subjects of state rule.¹⁸ This is particularly clear in cases where elections do not result in major changes of government.¹⁹

Spencer’s phrase ‘drama of unity and difference’ is well chosen, because it covers both aspects of elections. On one hand it captures the spectacle, intrigue and transgression around antagonistic identities. And on the other hand, it alludes to the dignified performance of citizenship that affirms the unity and righteousness of the system. Political identities thus feature in different ways: in the way individual citizens identify themselves with the nation, and in the way people grapple with multiple (and possibly contradictory) group identities, which may be constructed around locality, ethnicity, religion, caste or otherwise. And it is these identities, and the interaction between them, that make elections the colourful, spectacular and schism-prone phenomena that they often are. As we will see in the case of Trincomalee’s Muslims below, elections cause people to show their colours and it through this process that both the existential and potentially sundering qualities of the political become apparent.

Identity politics in Sri Lanka

The case discussed in this paper is somewhat of an anomaly. First of all, Sri Lanka is one among few countries where elections and democratic changes of government continued despite protracted armed conflicts, most obviously the Tamil separatist war in the northeast (1980s – 2009), but Sinhala Marxist uprisings elsewhere in the

¹⁶ Banerjee, op. cit., ‘Democracy, sacred, and everyday’.

¹⁷ J. Dunn, ‘From Democracy to Representation: An Interpretation of a Ghanaian Election’, in *Political Obligation in its Historical Context: Essays in Political Theory*, J. Dunn (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980; M. Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1985 [1964]; S. Lukes, ‘Political Ritual and Social Integration’. *Sociology*, 9, 1975, pp. 289–308.

¹⁸ Bertrand, Briquet and Pels, op. cit.

¹⁹ Indonesia under Suharto was a fascinating example. See: J. Pemberton, ‘Notes on the 1982 General Elections in Solo’. *Indonesia*, 41, 1986, pp. 1–22.

country as well (1970s and 1980s). Secondly, the elections of April 2010 were particular. They were the first parliamentary elections after the war, and unlike many other elections, it was more or less clear from the start that the Rajapaksa government would win, thriving on its military victory and Sinhala patriotism. Thirdly, the paper focuses on the Muslim community, which does not normally feature saliently in political analyses of Sri Lanka. This paper thus tells the story of a particular population group, in a particular country, at a particular time. However, the central point – about people’s need to show their political colours and the flurry of socio-political behaviour that stems from this – is more fundamental. It sheds light on the nature of politics in Sri Lanka and it resonates with political contestation in other parts of the world.

The problematic relation between Sri Lanka’s democratic politics and Tamil separatism is well studied.²⁰ The island inherited its political infrastructure from British colonial rule, but electoral dynamics after independence developed a distinct ethno-nationalist tone. The perceived need to redress the colonial grievances of the Sinhala majority (73 per cent²¹) resulted in pro-Sinhala policies. The two main parties, the United National Party (UNP) and its early split-off, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), meanwhile developed a ferocious rivalry, which not only resulted in alternating capitalist (UNP) and socialist (SLFP) orientations, but also in ‘ethnic outbidding’. The Tamil minority (13 per cent) parties gradually shifted from advocating minority rights to outright separatism. This evolved into protracted civil war from the 1980s onwards.

The introduction of a Proportional Representation (PR) system and a powerful Executive Presidency in 1978 ended the supremacy of the two mainstream parties to the benefit of smaller ones – each with a distinct ethnic profile – who became ‘kingmakers’ that tip the balance in favour of either mainstream party. PR however bolstered the salience of Sinhala nationalism and led to instable coalition politics, which continued to exclude minority parties that were unwilling to trade their principles for patronage.²² This tendency was reinforced by PR’s introduction of preferential votes and the creation of a national list (unelected Members of Parliament

²⁰ S. Bastian, ‘Electoral Systems and Political Outcomes’. *Law and Society Trust Review*, 15:210, 2005, pp. 18–25; Uyangoda, op.cit.; Venugopal, op. cit.; Wickremesinghe, op. cit.

²¹ Population statistics are based on the author’s calculation using 2007 census data.

²² Bastian, op. cit.

assigned by the biggest parties), which shifted importance to individual MPs and their ability to cross over.

Muslim politics

With about 1.6 million people, the Muslim community forms Sri Lanka's second-largest minority (9 per cent). They live dispersed across the country, but the main concentrations lie in the east. The Muslims have close cultural and linguistic links with the Tamils.²³ Whilst there was some initial Muslim affinity with 'the Tamil cause', the escalation of ethnic violence in the 1980s and 1990s drove a wedge between the two communities. After decades of Sinhala and Tamil nationalism, the Muslims thus joined the fray with their own discourse of ethnic rights and belonging.²⁴ The political coming of age of the Muslims was closely associated with the creation of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) in the early 1980s, and with the proliferation of Islamic reform movements, which bolstered the salience of a Muslim identity.²⁵ 'Congress' – SLMC's common short name – was also a response to the war. The everyday reality of violence, extortion and intimidation in the northeast hardened ethnic fault lines and created a stronger need for political leadership to speak on behalf of the besieged Muslim community.²⁶

The SLMC inserted a unified Muslim voice into Sri Lankan politics. Congress adopted a more militant Muslim rhetoric, but nonetheless joined whichever party entered government to secure ministerial positions and resources. Whereas a principled agenda of Muslim rights worked to unite the Muslim electorate, patronage produced a divisive impulse. After the death of its founding father in 2000, Congress could no longer keep its fragmented Muslim pockets together. Rauf Hakeem won the

²³ The Muslims do not have a caste system, though their clan-related politics at times bears some semblance.

²⁴ D. McGilvray, 'Sri Lankan Muslims: Between Ethno-Nationalism and the Global Ummah'. *Nations and Nationalism*, 17:1, 2011, pp. 45–64; M. O'Sullivan, *Identity and Institutions in Ethnic Conflict: The Muslims of Sri Lanka*, PhD dissertation, Oxford University, 1999.

²⁵ F. Haniffa, 'Piety as Politics amongst Muslim Women in Contemporary Sri Lanka'. *Modern Asian Studies*, 42:2/3, 2008, pp. 347–375; B. Klem, 'Islam, Politics and Violence in Eastern Sri Lanka'. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 70:3, 2011, pp. 730–753; McGilvray, op. cit.

²⁶ J. Goodhand, B. Klem and B. Korf, 'Religion, conflict and boundary politics in Sri Lanka'. *European Journal for Development Research*, 21:5, 2009, pp. 679–898; S. Hasbullah and B. Korf, 'Muslim Geographies and the Politics of Purification in Sri Lanka after the 2004 Tsunami', *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 30, 2009, pp. 248–264; D. McGilvray and M. Raheem, *Muslim Perspectives on the Sri Lankan Conflict*, Policy Studies 41, East West Center, Washington DC, 2007; McGilvray, op. cit.

succession struggle, but renegade MPs created their own electoral machines: the National Unity Alliance (NUA), National Congress (NC) and the All Ceylon Muslim Congress (ACMC). Dissent intensified when SLMC entered opposition benches in 2004, while the various factions joined government to safeguard benefits for their constituencies.

The tendency to vote for pragmatic town-based MPs did not match well, however, with the Muslim concerns about the peace talks between the LTTE and the government (in 2002-2003 and in 2006). Muslim leaders played no significant role in the process and this raised acute anxieties. Worried that their political leaders were arranging deckchairs on the Titanic, while the future of their community was at stake, youths, academics, religious leaders and activists called for a more solid, principled defence of Muslim rights and needs.²⁷ These concerns persisted when the peace talks collapsed and the war resumed in 2006. The tension between the Muslim rights agenda (minority issues) and 'development' (town-based patronage) continues and this tension accounts for much of the internal fracturing that plagues the Muslim community today. Although the military defeat of the LTTE in May 2009 took away some of the original *raison d'être* of SLMC, Muslim anxieties about Sinhala domination, 'colonisation' of lands, and the military presence have increased. Yet, the influx of post-war resources and the construction of infrastructure add gravity to the need to be in government. The Muslim polity thus continues to navigate the difficult terrain of a besieged community that lives dispersed between the Sinhala majority and the Tamil minority and cannot afford to completely alienate either.

Ethnic geography and electoral politics in Trincomalee

Trincomalee is an old harbour town on Sri Lanka's east coast. Historically, the alternating Tamil and Muslim settlements along the coast were the main centres of population. Twentieth century irrigation schemes have brought a significant population to the hitherto sparsely inhabited interior areas.²⁸ Controversially, this altered the ethnic demography of the region. What was a predominantly Tamil-speaking area (Muslims and Tamils), has gradually become a tri-ethnic district in the

²⁷ Klem, op. cit.; McGilvray and Raheem, op. cit.

²⁸ T. Gaasbeek, *Bridging Troubled Waters? Everyday Inter-ethnic Interaction in a Context of Violent Conflict in Kottiyar Pattu, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka*, PhD Dissertation, Wageningen University, Wageningen, 2010.

Map 1. Trincomalee District, population size and ethnic distribution per division



Source: 2007 census data, map composed by the author.

past century: 45 per cent Muslims, 29 per cent Tamils and 25 per cent Sinhalese (2007 Census). Map 1 sketches the district's ethnic geography, including the Muslim pockets. Kinniya is by far the biggest Muslim settlement; Muthur, Pulmoddai, Kuchchaveli, Tophur and Tampalagamam are the smaller towns with a mixed Tamil-Muslim population.

The strategic and symbolic importance Trincomalee and its harbour are not reflected in electoral politics. The district's 334,000 inhabitants form a mere 1.66 per cent of the national population. With four MPs in a 225-seat parliament, Trincomalee is in fact Sri Lanka's least influential electoral district. But although the composition of the four seats is unimportant nationally, people attach great value to it within the local political dynamic.

Table 1. Parliamentary elections in Trincomalee District since 1977

Year	TULF (TNA)	SLFP (PA, UPFA)	SLMC	UNP (UNF)	MPs (Muslim MPs in bold)
1977	27% (1 seat)	24% (1 seat)	NA	47% (1 seat)	- Sampanthan (Tamil, Trincomalee town TULF) - MEH Maharoof (Muslim, Kinniya, UNP) - Leelaratne (Sinhala, UNP)
1989	13%	23% (1)	18%	22% (1)	- Sivaprakashan (Tamil, independent) - Ameer (Muslim, independent) - MEH Maharoof (Muslim, UNP, Kinniya) - Gunawardena (Sinhala, SLFP, Kantale)
1994	24% (1)	20%	22% (1)	29% (2)	- MEH Maharoof (Muslim, UNP, Kinniya) - Ranaweera (Sinhala, UNP) - Thangathurai (Tamil, TULF) - Najib (Muslim, SLMC, Kinniya)
2000	11%	(PA, incl. SLMC) 40% (3)		35% (1)	- Najib (Muslim, SLMC, Kinniya) - Baithulla (Muslim, PA) - Gunawardena (Sinhala, PA, Kantale) - MAM Maharoof (Muslim, UNP, Kinniya)
2001	35% (1) (+1 nat'l list)	20% (1)	(UNF, incl. SLMC) 39% (2)		- Sampanthan (Tamil, Trincomalee town, TULF) - Gunawardena (Sinhala, PA, Kantale) - Thideer Thoufiq (Muslim, UNP, Muthur) - MAM Maharoof (Muslim, UNP, Kinniya) <i>National list:</i> Thurairathnasingham (Tamil, Muthur, TULF)
2004	37% (2)	17% (1)	36% (1)	9%	- Sampanthan (Tamil, Trincomalee town TULF) - Thurairathnasingham (Tamil, TULF, Sampur) - Najib (Muslim, SLMC, Kinniya) - Jayantha Wijesekara (Sinhala, UPFA)

Source: records of the parliamentary library, Kotte. Archival research was carried out by Ajiwadeen.

Table 1 provides an overview of the dynamics and outcomes at previous parliamentary elections. A few observations stand out. Firstly, the SLMC has been a significant force in the district since its inception. Its alignment with either SLFP or UNP and associated cross-overs play a significant role in the outcomes. Secondly, the number of Muslim MPs varies, but at any given time there is at least one from Kinniya, the district's biggest Muslim town. Thirdly, there are 'political families'. Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) leader Sampanthan, son of Rajavarothiam (MP from 1952-1964), has a recurring presence. Among the Muslims, Najib is a salient SLMC character. He owes much of his fame to his father Abdul Majeed (MP from 1960-1977). The rivalling Kinniya family, the Maharoots, persistently ran for the UNP. MEH Maharoot was a strong figure until his assassination in the late 1990s. His father was also in politics, his brother was an MP (1952-1977) and a minister (1978-1989 and 1990-1994) and his son Imran Maharoot was to contest in 2010.

The 2010 parliamentary elections

What follows is a chronological narrative of the 2010 parliamentary elections in the Muslim pockets of Trincomalee District. There were fairly clear phases in the unfolding script of elections and the text is organized accordingly: the aftermath of the presidential elections, the nomination phase, campaigning, election day, and post-election manoeuvring. As will become clear, the narrative in fact comprises a number of interlacing storylines. The penultimate section will untangle these different political narratives.

Aftermath of the presidential elections

Mahinda Rajapaksa (SLFP) successfully secured his position at the presidential elections of 26 January 2010. He had scheduled elections early, to capitalize on the government's victory over the LTTE in May 2009. The campaign became a neck-and-neck race when Rajapaksa's former army commander, General Sarath Fonseka, fell out with the regime and presented himself as a candidate. He gained the support from the entire opposition, but this rainbow alliance of hitherto archenemies proved to repel as many voters as it attracted. Bolstered by control over the state media, the SLFP campaign extolled Rajapaksa's victory over LTTE 'terrorism' and post-war

development prospects. Rajapaksa triumphed with a comfortable margin: 58 per cent against 40 per cent for Fonseka. The re-elected government did not waste any time in settling the scores. Fonseka was arrested and tried in a dubious court case.

The majority of Trincomalee District's electorate had voted for Fonseka and people were worried about punitive actions. The navy re-installed a fishing ban (a common occurrence during the war), thus barring a significant portion of the population from eking out a living. In subsequent days, a round of bureaucratic transfers followed. Civil servants whose governmental loyalty was in doubt were sent to less enviable locations. Meanwhile triumphant SLFP organizers were handing out kiribath (lumpy milk rice, often consumed to celebrate auspicious moments) at their poster-plastered stalls. The tone for the forthcoming parliamentary elections had been set.

Setting the stage: the nomination phase

Parliamentary polls were still over two months away, but already featured saliently in the rumour circuit and the papers, because candidate lists were being drawn up. This stage of marshalling forces is crucial. The composition of the lists may be seen as the pre-shuffling of political identities, accentuating some bonds and boundaries, and de-activating others. The ethnic background of candidates, the inclusion of respected political families, and the towns they represent strongly affect electoral decisions. People in the district were very familiar with the underlying arithmetic. They started speculating how many thousand votes from which town were secure for which party or candidate, and how many might swing. The actual bargaining took place in backstage discussions in Colombo. Potential candidates were not sighted in their towns for days or weeks and they would only return for quick consultations with their local advisors, organizers and sympathizers.

The whole process was complicated, because for each of the potential candidates, success was contingent on the choices of other candidates. After all, the overall composition could unite or split voting blocks. Constituencies wanted their candidate on the list, but too many Muslim candidates (for example) would water down the vote. The smaller Muslim pockets of Trincomalee District – Muthur, Tophur, Kuchchaveli, Pulmoddai – did not represent sufficient votes for a parliamentary seat, so they needed to join hands either with each other or with the one

Muslim town that *was* big enough to elect a candidate: Kinniya. On top of the inter-town dispersion, the community was divided on the aforementioned rights versus development question: whether to vote for government or opposition. The majority had voted against Mahinda Rajapaksa during the presidential elections, because they were anxious about government plans and Sinhala domination in the region. The leadership of the country's main Muslim party (SLMC) continued to toe that line, but many voters felt that siding against the government was inadvisable with the Rajapaksas in power for at least another seven years.²⁹

The gravitational pull of the government became clear to me when I visited Adabuma Thoufiq, the local council chairman in Pulmoddai, the Muslim town in the north of the district. The access road from Trincomalee used to be interrupted by three ferry crossings. Brand new bridges were built after the 2004 tsunami, but at the Yang Oya river, travellers were still directed to the rusty, unreliable ferry. This had more to do with politics than with engineering, Mr. Thoufiq explained. He had organized a ceremonial opening, but the chief engineer had closed the bridge again, because Thoufiq was SLMC and thus belonged to the opposition. 'I received calls from SLFP people telling me: "How can you open the bridge? That's a job for the government." Like that. Then the police called to make an inquiry. [...] For insulting His Excellency the president. [...] The police came and threatened me. Telling me, we have been appointed by the government, so if you go against the government, we can't help you.' Thoufiq angrily told me the government's days were counted, because 'the people' were fed up. 'There's no transparency, the cost of living is high, the family influence is too big [he meant: Rajapaksa nepotism], there's no space for opposition'. He complained that other Muslim politicians crossed over to the government, serving the petty interests of their own constituency, while jeopardising the larger cause of the Muslim community.

When I met Mr. Thoufiq a few weeks later, he had joined the government himself. 'There was no way,' he explained sheepishly. The voters were shifting towards the government. The SLMC, he now thought, was stubborn not to do the same. 'It creates a communal problem. Because the government thinks why should we work for the people who vote for the opposition. It will be here for seven years.

²⁹ The presidential term is six years, but Mahinda Rajapaksa managed to postpone his inauguration on the count that his first term hadn't officially finished yet, because he had called elections early.

There's no way to work against the government. We have no power to stop them. In the opposition, we can't oppose the government.' On the 25 February, the Prime Minister came over to open the Yang Oya bridge and Thoufiq attended the ceremony in government ranks. He joined the campaign of Poonchanilama, a Sinhalese politician from Ratnapura, to whom we will turn below.

On the opposite side of the district, in Muthur, the narrative was almost entirely in sync. 'Opposition is pointless,' a respected community leader in Muthur told us. He considered running as a National Congress candidate, a party that had joined the government. He was negotiating with NC leader Athaulla. 'But it will be hard here. This is an SLMC area. [...] I need more than 18,000 votes, but here in Muthur there are only 13,000 Muslim votes. In Tophur another 6,000. Kuchaveli, Pulmoddai and Nilaveli voted for Najib [the MP from Kinniya] before, but now they say they'll vote for a Muthur candidate.' To verify his chances, he met with local leaders and representatives of mosques and madrassas. In the end he decided to withdraw. 'I told the people either we have to be all together or we'll lose. [...] But I concluded that the community was not ready to all unite under one umbrella. Some Muslims would vote Congress; some decided to go with Sinhala candidates of the government. Unfortunately there are three candidates from Muthur. That will split the vote. So I told Athaulla I can't do it. [...] Athaulla said don't worry. I will give you a good position, a chairman of the board or something. But I did not want to do that.'

'Actually I hate politics,' this abortive candidate confided, 'and so does my wife.' Some of his friends advised him not to get into politics. 'They told me I'm not ideal for politics. I'm not ready for the thuggery.' The concern with the 'dirty' business of politics upset him. So much so, that he disappeared for the whole election period and went for pilgrimage in Mecca. 'I was disturbed by the whole thing,' he told me afterwards. This personal sentiment reflects a broader concern that elections and politics cause disturbances, unsavoury arrangements and threaten the unity of the community.

There was fierce competition between candidates aspiring a place on the government list (the United People's Freedom Alliance³⁰). With the electoral mood swinging towards President Rajapaksa, the bargaining positions changed. Candidates brokered nominations on less advantageous terms. The main electoral competition

³⁰ The UPFA was a compilation of the SLFP and junior partners. People simply called them 'government' however, and to prevent an overdose of acronyms, so will I.

shifted from one between government and opposition to fierce rivalry between government candidates, who were convinced the government would win, but were increasingly worried they might not be part of its victory. Tellingly, my respondents had trouble spelling out the main opposition list (United National Front, encompassing both UNP and SLMC). Typically, they would know the SLMC candidate from their town (M.S. Thoufiq from Kinniya; Harees from Muthur), but had to guess the names of the others. From the TULF list, they only knew Sampanthan. Other lists – seventeen parties and fourteen independent groups were enlisted in Trincomalee District – were considered insignificant. The only list that really mattered was the government (see table 2).

Table 2. The government list

Candidate	Place of origin	Ethnicity	Party affiliation	Occupation
1. Gunawardane	Kantale	Sinhala	SLFP (veteran)	MP, deputy Minister
2. (Mrs) Ari Eka	Kantale	Sinhala	SLFP (new)	Restaurant owner
3. Najib Majeed	Kinniya	Muslim	ACMC (ex-SLMC)	MP, Minister
4. Nias	Muthur	Muslim	NC (ex-SLMC)	Civil servant
5. Sabarula	Kinniya	Muslim	NC (ex-SLMC)	Lawyer
6. Thideer Thoufiq	Muthur	Muslim	ACMC (ex-SLMC)	Council chairman
7. Poonchanilama	Ratnapura (in the south of the country)	Sinhala	SLFP (ex-UNP)	MP, Minister

Source: Interviews and observations.

Competition between the two SLMC split offs – National Congress and the All Ceylon Muslim Congress – had enabled the government to grant both factions two nominations on the Trincomalee District lists. The other three were given to Sinhala candidates. The majority of government candidates in the district was thus Muslim, but rather than a triumph this was considered bad news for the Muslim electorate. Their vote would be spread across four candidates, while the Sinhala vote would be divided by only three. Similarly, the Muslim candidates were evenly split between two Muslim towns: Kinniya and Muthur. A classic scenario of splitting the vote was thus about to unfold. The Muslim community, so often adamant about its need to stand united, had allowed itself to be torn up by town-based rivalries, and they were troubled by the tension between ‘development’ (access to government patronage) and ‘rights’ (a perceived need to resist Sinhala domination).

Canvassing and campaigning

Though most of the local big men and prominent political families had joined the government list, the SLMC (the UNF's main constituent in Trincomalee) still enjoyed support. 'The tree is our religion,' staunch Congress voters would say with reference to the SLMC symbol. Muthur in particular was seen as an 'SLMC bastion'. It had long been a border town between government and LTTE controlled territory and the SLMC was seen as the best bet in defending Muslim minority rights and concerns. The rights agenda propagated by the SLMC continued to feature in the post-war elections.

One of Muthur's fishermen explained his convictions to us. 'When the end of the war came, we expected to go fishing independently.' But the navy continued to impose fishing bans, the most recent one because the fishermen voted for the opposition at the presidential polls. 'Now you may think,' he told us, 'why don't these people accept that the government has done a lot of help for them. Why don't they just accept the government? That's true. That's how we could think. But the government did not balance the rights of the Sinhalese, the Tamils and the Muslims. For example, if we have a problem with the Sinhalese people and we go to the police, they will support the Sinhalese. [...] they will accept the Sinhalese version of the story. They will always win. That's the only reason we will vote SLMC. The government will always think about the majority.'

SLMC candidates and organizers tapped into these sentiments during their 'pocket meetings'. These were the most common form of campaigning and targeted the people living around a given junction, typically at dinnertime when people were at home. Party supporters decorated the junction with posters and installed loudspeakers to rehearse their key campaign issues, as the local inhabitants gathered at the junction. Those who were less interested or preferred not to be seen (all the women, as well as foreign researchers) would quietly listen in from their yard or house. On one of the UNF meetings I attended, the speaker alluded to the big battle between the LTTE and the army waged in Muthur in 2006:

Then it was only the other Muslims who helped us. If the government gets two seats, they will both be Sinhala; if the UNF gets two seats, both will be Muslim. [...] The Sinhalese are encroaching on our land. We need to build a good leadership for the Muslims. Not just

development, we also need rights. [...] Najib [the incumbent candidate from Kinniya] is not active. He is sleeping in parliament. [Names politicians who crossed over to the government] are in place because of their Muslim votes. When they joined the president they went against the Muslim Congress and against the Muslim people. [...] The government has put four Muslim candidates and three Sinhalese. It is a trick to split the Muslim vote.

The next evening, government candidate Nias (NC) organized a slightly bigger pocket meeting at Main Street. Boys and men came over and lingered around, sitting on their bicycles and motorcycles. A university lecturer from Kandy added prominence to the meeting. He extolled the government's road building efforts and discredited SLMC leader Hakeem. 'He will tell you if you vote for the SLMC, he'll give you a seat on the national list. But that's a lie. He promises that everywhere. In Ootamavadi, he promises that. In Eravur, he promises that. Everywhere, he says that. In Muthur, he will promise the same thing.' Nias continued on the same note. 'Hakeem is still not here. If he comes to Muthur, the people will ask him for a place on the national list, but he can't give that. That's the reason he does not come to Muthur.' Nias went on, but a few minutes into his somewhat uninspired speech, he was cut off by Azan (the call for prayer) and the small crowd dispersed to one of the neighbouring mosques. After Aisha (evening prayer) they rehearsed the same routine on the other side of town.

In brief, government candidates emphasized the virtues of 'development' (and Congress' impotence in delivering largesse), while the SLMC propagated the discourse of Muslim 'rights' (and accused government candidates for squandering them). It proved difficult to keep the two apart, though. Congress candidates would also highlight post-war improvements in the infrastructure, but they would try to dissect it from government patronage. Government candidates in turn could not let go of the Muslim minority discourse altogether. When we visited government candidate Nias at home, his compromised loyalty became clear. He in fact started to sound much like a Congress candidate, when he criticized government land allocations to Sinhalese from outside the district, and complained that the government had 'imported a politician', referring to the successful newcomer from Ratnapura: Poonchanilama.

Nias' worries were understandable. While he and other local notables were holding their pocket meetings, Poonchanilama toured the district with a whole

caravan of buses, vans three-wheelers, and motorcycles, all decorated with flags, loudspeakers, and banners. On 21 March, the main government rally at the cricket stadium of Trincomalee town started with a massive security presence, followed by helicopters flying in Prime Minister Wickremanayake. The rest of the town was deserted. Inside the stadium, hundreds of spectators listened to the Prime Minister, who delivered a thundering speech in Sinhala. On the stage behind him sat tens of dignitaries – monks, ulama, priests, senior citizens and of course the government candidates. The familiar king-size pictures of the president, the bridges, and the power plants to the left and right completed the entourage. Most prominent on these pictures, apart from the president: Susantha Poonchanilama.

He was new to the area, but as the district minister for ‘Nation-Building’ – the government’s main channel of patronage to the northeast – Poonchanilama had ample means to show his political muscle. People said, asphalt emerged where he set foot. Unlike most other candidates, he managed to deliver construction work – roads, electricity supply, drainage – within weeks, if not days. A man from Kinniya summarized the amazement: ‘He’s like spiderman. It’s like magic to the people.’ Less powerful, local candidates, like Nias, obviously felt overshadowed and spent as much energy preserving their vote base from these ‘intruders’ as they spent discrediting the opposition. Their primary trump card was their connection to the local community. In fact, Muslim pockets like Muthur are so small, that almost everyone knows everyone, through extended family, school, or work. ‘People vote for their relations,’ a woman from Muthur said. Nias was her relation so she voted for him, but Thideer Thoufiq was her former classmate. Personal loyalties thus complicated larger political orientations, to do with the Muslim cause and patronage.

Election day and results

After weeks of rallies, pocket meetings and door-to-door visits, election day approached. People were increasingly confident about their predictions. They all agreed on a few counts: the government would secure two of the four seats in Trincomalee District. One of them would be Gunawardena, who had a solid base in the Sinhala dominated Seruwila Electorate. ‘He’s already selected.’ The UNF (comprising UNP and SLMC) would get one seat: most likely M.S. Thoufiq from Kinniya. The Tamil leader Sampanthan (TULF) would also get one seat. For my

Muslim informants with an interest in politics, there were only two uncertainties left. First, which of the six remaining government candidates win the second government seat? And – importantly – would it be a Muslim or a Sinhalese? Second, there was the wild card of the national list. Theoretically, unsuccessful candidates could still be rewarded. In a nutshell, that was all election day itself was still about.

Three days before the elections – from 5 April onwards – electoral protocol disallowed campaign rallies. Party supporters continued to go door by door, however, talking to the people, handing them shiny pictures of their candidate and showing them on fake ballots which names to cross. They would often give the family a small inducement as well, my informants said. This went on till the election day itself (8 April). Unlike the presidential elections, which had been quite tense, the atmosphere in Muthur, Kinniya and surrounding villages was very calm. People gradually swarmed to their polling station, often in small groups, taking their children and grannies along. Both men and women turned up, often in separate groups. In each ward or village, a school or other public building had been equipped with polling booths. Policemen guarded the premises and civil servants from all kinds of departments had been recruited for ‘election duty’ to assure the registration, the placing of ink on the voter’s fingertip, the voting and counting was properly done. Public buses were chartered to transport people from remote locations to their polling stations, not an everyday luxury for villagers. Much in line with observations of anthropologists elsewhere³¹, voters undertook their franchise as an honourable task. They had dressed up and there was a strong sense of duty and dignity in the way they went and came to the polling stations.

Although the turn out at the elections was relatively low – both in the district (62 per cent) and nationally (61 per cent) – the elections were somehow present in everyone’s mind, at every corner, in every conversation. After voting, the men sat together to speculate about the outcomes. Many people knew someone on ‘election duty’, and rapid exchanges of SMS messages started to inject bits of evidence into the latest predictions. People knew how many thousands had voted for whom in which area and soon, their friends and relations from Muslim pockets elsewhere in the country started sending their estimates over. People were making bets and jokes. When I walked through Muthur with a known Nias supporter, one of the groups

³¹ Banerjee, op. cit., ‘Democracy, sacred, and everyday’; Spencer, op. cit., *Anthropology, Politics and the State*.

engaged with him, saying: 'If Nias gets even 10,000 votes, I will buy you a van.' All roared with laughter including – if blushingly – my friend. Others were starting to brace themselves for the prospective outcomes. People put up new signs of the candidates they thought would win, I was told, not because they voted for them, but to prevent themselves from being accused of disloyalty. The election day thus brought together a fascinating mix of the dignified performance of citizenship, street-corner joking and speculation, and the anticipation of possible trouble.

The official results were announced on national television throughout the night, but the next morning, the Trincomalee District results were still not out. The Elections Commissioner had ordered a re-poll after an incident in Kumburuputty, south of Kuchchaveli. I visited the Tamil inhabitants – whom I happened to know – and they reported two Sinhala men and a Tamil woman had come in a van. They were drunk and intimidated the people, telling them to 'vote for number seven' (Poonchanilama) and blocking entrance to the polling station. A military patrol stood by, idling. The people contacted TULF leader Sampanthan, who called the Elections Commissioner. The incident attracted some attention, because it was one of two places where a re-poll was ordered (a bigger disruption took place in Nawalapitiya, near Kandy), but everyone knew the re-election on 20 April would make no difference: only 977 voters were registered at the polling station.

Counting of all other areas finished on 10 April. When the results were announced, the newspapers left no place for doubt. Page wide headings of 'historic wins' and triumphant pictures applauded the government victory. Official results for Trincomalee (and Kandy) were withheld to that date, but the SMS circuit made them a public secret. The local pundits had proven their predictive skill. The government had indeed secured two seats, while the UNF (UNP and SLMC) and the TULF both got one. It was also little surprise that Gunawardena got one of the government seats (19,734 preference votes) and that veteran Tamil leader Sampanthan secured the TULF seat (24,488 votes). As predicted, Kinniya SLMC-er M.S. Thoufiq topped the UNF list (23,588), though his junior townsman Imran Maharoof (heir of the Maharoof dynasty) came close (19,665). The revelation was that Poonchanilama, the only candidate from outside the region, captured the other government seat. With 22,820 votes, he in fact came well ahead of Gunawardena. The present MP, Najib – the one accused of sleeping in parliament – was sent home (15,906), and Muthur's candidates (Nias and Thideer Thoufiq) ended last on the government list (with 4,299 and 5,096

votes respectively). Their personal loss was soothed, however, by a prospective promotion of some sort. It was widely believed the government would reward them with a lucrative position for the votes they had collected. Just after the election, a new phase thus started, rather similar to the nomination phase. The candidates disappeared to Colombo to attend party meetings and ministerial inaugurations, whilst bargaining for their own prospects.

Post-election manoeuvring

Nation-wide, the government's 144 seats would soon expand to a two-third majority (150) when opposition MPs started crossing over. The UNF shrunk to 60 seats, of which eight (including two national seats) were SLMC. The Sinhala leftist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) – with Sarath Fonseka at the helm – retained a mere 7 MPs. The TULF secured most of the Tamil vote with 14 seats. The numerous other factions and independent candidates were chanceless.

In Trincomalee, the composition of the government candidate list had ruptured the Muslim vote. Respondents from the smaller Muslim pockets blamed the Kinniya electorate, which had failed to stand united (with about 12,400 votes for both the government and the UNF). They provided the government with sufficient votes to take two seats, but failed to make sure at least one of these was Muslim. People from Kinniya explained they turned away from the 'lethargic' Najib, but had no good alternative on the government list. The second Kinniya candidate – Sabarula – was considered chanceless and the other two Muslim candidates were from Muthur. The result was an electoral tragedy: both government MPs were Sinhala (Poonchanilama and Gunawardena). The Muslims were practically cut off from government patronage and the district's only Muslim MP (M.S. Thoufiq, SLMC) sat in a severely weakened opposition. Neither 'rights', nor 'development' had been served.

Hope was vested in two last resorts: a cross-over or a national seat. With so few seats for the UNF, they had only nine national seats to distribute, of which the UNP leadership gave two to the SLMC. Congress leader Hakeem faced the tedious task of meeting the demands of his fragmented and dispersed vote base. In Muthur, a big SLMC meeting was held on 12 April to pressure Hakeem to grant their townsman Harees (who came second on the list with 10,820 votes) a national seat, but Hakeem decided otherwise. A cross-over by the district's only Muslim MP (M.S. Thoufiq) was

the only remaining possible access to government, but he remained loyal to the SLMC. Eventually, all eight Congress MPs would leave the UNF to join government ranks, but they got little in return for their belated support.

Divisions within the Muslim community – between parties, between towns, between families – thus resulted in a deception. As a minority overshadowed by a Sinhala-led government and Tamil separatists, Muslims tend to emphasize their need to stand together, but internal division reared its head once more. My respondents were acutely aware of this. The sermon at the Jumma prayer the day after the elections was about unity, my research assistant told me. ‘The imam said Muslims should be peaceful after the elections. We are all brothers. We had the elections, but we all want to live here together. We are all Muslims. We will face each other again. We’ll be at each other’s funerals.’

Interlacing storylines

The preceding electoral narrative consists of several interlacing storylines, and – importantly – there are tensions between them. Firstly, there is the narrative of performing citizenship. Much in line with the anthropological literature that conceives of elections as a political ritual³², elections provide a stage for people to exercise their franchise and thus enact their membership of a nation. Poor villagers, whose opinion normally carries little power, get transported by public buses, present themselves in front of state officials at the polling station, and by casting their vote, they take part in a national political ceremony, that gets televised and affects the most powerful people in the country. Seen in this light, it is unsurprising that we witnessed families dressed up in their best clothes, exhibiting decorum, dignity and duty. These particular elections carried an additional symbolic charge. They marked the government’s military victory over ‘terrorism’, and this enabled President Rajapaksa to belabour his patriotic credentials. There is of course a difference between ‘citizens’ and ‘patriots’ and this became quite clear in the way the government treated its political opponents. Rajapaksa’s presidential re-election set the tone for the parliamentary election campaign. Fonseka ended up in jail and the opposition crumbled. The channels of patronage tightened. Supporters got kiribath, opponents got transferred.

³² Banerjee, op. cit., ‘Democracy, sacred, and everyday’; Spencer, *Anthropology, Politics and the State*.

Muslim politics comprises a second storyline. As the second-largest minority, the Muslims have always had to navigate between the ethno-nationalism of the Sinhala majority and the ethno-separatism of the Tamil minority. The Muslims share some of the Tamil grievances, but fell out with the LTTE and Muslim leaders have often joined Sinhala-led governments. In short, the resulting tensions pivot on a trade-off between Muslim rights (mainly driven by anxieties over Sinhala or Tamil domination) and development (the need to be in government and secure benefits). Muslim Congress' history is closely tied up with concern over the plight of 'the Muslim people'. It originated as a political project to give voice to a besieged minority group. After the war, a significant number of Muslims clinched on to the SLMC's rights discourse, because 'the government will always think about the majority'. Fear of 'colonisation' and fishing bans reinforced their concern with Sinhala dominance. In line with other recent work on Sri Lankan Muslims³³, activating the boundary between Muslims and other ethnic groups comes forward as a vital part of the political equation.

Yet, on the other hand, Muslims voters see the need for patronage and in the post-war political landscape, many felt 'opposition is pointless'. Muslim leaders have to walk the tightrope, because they cannot afford to drop the Muslim identity issue or disengage from minority-related issues, but an overly militant position blocks access to government largesse. Pulmoddai's big man Adabuma Thoufiq, for example, first propagated a principled stance on minority issues. But when he was intimidated after a bridge opening ceremony, he joined the government. The pull towards government patronage drove a new nail in SLMC's coffin. Votes gravitated towards the NC and APMC – renegade SLMC factions that lined up with the government – and many Muslims felt Congress was intransigent to align against the government.

Patronage ties inevitably cordon off smaller groups, for one can hardly deliver development benefits to the entire 'Muslim people'. That brings us to the third electoral storyline: town-based identities and personal loyalties. These dynamics play a significant role in people's voting decisions. Many voters knew one or more candidate personally through extended family or otherwise. These loyalties are closely connected to place. And indeed, the rivalry between Muslim towns is fierce. Kinniya's demographic weight has long propelled the exclusion of smaller

³³ Haniffa, op. cit.; Hasbullah and Korf, op. cit.; Klem, op. cit.; McGilvray, op. cit.

settlements, like Muthur and Pulmoddai. Voters from these settlements were strongly inclined to vote for one of their townsmen, but they were acutely aware that they were too few to get him elected. They thus had to broker alignments with other towns, but time and again, they lost out. During the 2010 elections, that dynamic was aggravated by a local succession crisis in Kinniya. The incumbent MP Najib had lost much credit and with no obvious replacement from Kinniya on the government list, the vote dispersed. In the end, all had lost. Kinniya lost its direct access to government. The smaller towns tended to vote for the SLMC, but ironically the only Congress candidate to get elected was from Kinniya. To the agony of my Muslim respondents, this candidate was the only Muslim MP, while the district is one of the few places in the country where Muslims form the biggest ethnic group (45 per cent). It was unprecedented that both government MPs were Sinhalese. And the biggest winner was in fact an 'imported' politician: Susantha Poonchanilama from Ratnapura.

Conclusions

The flurry of activity described in this paper confirms that elections involve more than collective deliberation over the composition of government. That would not warrant the tremendous amount of work people put into elections. Most of them have little benefit to expect from a change in the parliamentary cast. Spencer's conceptualization of elections as 'moral dramas of identity and difference' provides an insightful vantage point. Elections raise existential questions: how people define themselves, their 'others', and their relation to the state. Elections involve the crafting (and re-crafting) of political identities, the activation (and de-activation) of political boundaries and the forging (or severing) of political loyalties. Rather than the exclusive realm of rational interests and consensus-seeking, politics can be understood as the continuous definition and redefinition of 'us' and 'them', friends and foes. As suggested by proponents of 'radical democracy'³⁴, and Spencer's application of these ideas to South Asia, antagonism plays a pivotal role.

The crucial political question, however, is: which 'us' and which 'them'? This paper's narrative brought forward different – and often contradictory – ways of defining political communities. The enactment of national citizenship, the

³⁴ Laclau and Mouffe, *op. cit.*; Mouffe, *op. cit.*

preoccupation with the Muslim people, and the tensions around personal ties to town-based patrons propagated different political identities and affinities. During the election period, different kinds of antagonism continued to play a role. The prevalence of one us-them divide over other antagonisms clearly is an outcome of hard political work. 'Election fever' involves more than one narrative, as pointed out in the previous section. Let me elaborate on this in the two conclusions below.

First, the connecting of these storylines temporarily makes the person, the community, and the nation more significant to each other. For a brief period, landless peasants and fishermen become citizens with a vote. Family relations are no longer just about weddings and favours. They tap into the nation's politics. Turf battles between towns find a new platform for contestation. Big men visit tranquil villages to deliver speeches and they actually keep last-minute promises. The claiming of territory by displaying posters, the show of force through massive rallies, the performance of loyalty by sitting on stage, and the decorum of queuing up for the ballot booth. Such political performance makes voters part of a national contest and that is why these acts assume prominence. This conclusion tallies very well with the anthropological body of work on the ritual qualities of elections.³⁵ Voting indeed is more than arithmetic. It comprises the performance of franchise, the dignified enactment of citizenship.

Second, the confluence of different storylines sheds light on the sense of rupture and disturbance that tends to accompany elections. It elucidates why communities – however adamant on preserving their unity – fall prey to the divisive forces of politics.³⁶ Trincomalee's Muslims had to show their colours on multiple fronts. They are quite adept at this chameleon-like behaviour, but elections cause difficulty, because their allegiances may clash. Being a loyal family member, a good townsman, or a respectable Muslim is difficult enough within one of the storylines, but being them all at once can create trouble when they engender divergent voting imperatives. This opens up a whole register of contradictions. It was these contradictions that left Muslims voters with such a disappointing outcome in April 2010, but they also harboured a threat to their everyday life. People feared that 'wrong' alignments would invoke punitive actions, like transfers, fishing bans and potentially violence. The story

³⁵ Banerjee, op. cit., 'Democracy, sacred, and everyday'; Bertrand, Briquet and Pels, op. cit.; Dunn, op. cit.; Lukes, op. cit.; Pemberton, op.cit.; Spencer, op. cit., *Anthropology, politics and the state*.

³⁶ Spencer, op. cit., *Anthropology, politics and the state*.

of communities putting up posters *after* elections to avoid accusations of being oppositional was one stark reminder that there was more at stake than parliamentary seats.

This case study raises more fundamental observations about politics in Sri Lanka and South Asia at large. The interaction between different kinds of identity struggles is central to ‘the political’. Apparent ‘master antagonisms’ – be it ethno-separatism in Sri Lanka³⁷, communal riots in Gujarat³⁸, or caste politics in West Bengal or Uttar Pradesh³⁹ – remain connected to other us-tem rivalries and political trajectories. This opens up additional dimensions of rupture and contestation: the political landscape is complicated by even more forms of struggles, which are not a mere derivative of national politics. But it also opens up space for political performances across the entrenched lines of contention, for example through the dignified enactment of national citizenship, or through more localised registers that offset the received political categories. Even people who emerge from several decades of ethnic enmity and separatist war have repertoires that reach out across fault lines. While elections were a time of licence and antagonism, Trincomalee’s voters also realised they had to keep political divisions within bounds. After all, they knew the imam was right in the Jumma sermon after the elections: they would all be seeing each other again at the next funeral or local festivity. The interaction between multiple forms of political antagonism thus not only sheds light on the moral dramas of elections, they also direct us to the long periods between the political highpoints of election fever; periods in which people also enact different identities and belongings, but often manage to keep the unruly and divisive potential of the political at bay.

³⁷ Bastian, op. cit.; Uyangoda, op. cit.; Venugopal, op. cit.; Wickremesinghe, op. cit.

³⁸ Berenschot, op. cit.; Shani, op. cit.; Spodek, op. cit.

³⁹ Doron, op. cit.; Roy, op. cit.

Article 3

"In the eye of the storm: Sri Lanka's front-line civil servants in transition", *Development and Change*, 43(3): 695-717.

In the Eye of the Storm: Sri Lanka's Front-Line Civil Servants in Transition

Bart Klem

ABSTRACT

This article narrates how bureaucrats in eastern Sri Lanka operated during and after the war. They managed to keep minimal state services running whilst being locked between the government and the insurgent Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). When the government defeated the LTTE in 2009, civil servants were freed from rebel coercion, but they also lost their counterweight against unappreciated policies from the capital and interference by local politicians. The article links the thinking on armed conflicts with the literature that conceptualizes 'the state' not as a coherent entity, but as a subject of continuous negotiation. The state's insignia provides a sense of legitimacy and supremacy, but governments have no monopoly on using it. Other powerful actors capture state institutions, resources and discourse for contradictory purposes. This perspective helps us reconcile the appearance of bureaucratic order with the peculiar and hybrid forms of rule that emerged in the war between rebels and government, and it sheds light on some of the surprising changes and continuities that occurred when that war ended. Public administration is neither just a victim of war, nor plainly a victor of the post-war situation.

INTRODUCTION

Navigating eastern Sri Lanka was a puzzling experience at the beginning of the twenty-first century. My tourist map still showed roads and ferries that had been destroyed by the war between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Icons of parasols ('beach') and stars ('point of interest') had lost their relevance. Administrative boundaries told me little about the borders that actually mattered. Areas that seemed closely connected were in fact separated by army checkpoints, beyond which the

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de facto state of Tamil Eelam began. Tantalisingly, a short dusty ride beyond the checkpoint, visitors would encounter a government bureaucrat sitting in a government office. The state upheld a public administration in the very same areas its planes and artillery were targeting. Tamil separatism had yielded a patchy geography of barbed wire, checkpoints and violence, but civil servants' salaries, state services, pensions and school exams defied the clearly demarcated spheres of military control. Armed conflict — however violent and disastrous — was nothing like the chaos I had expected.

On the same journey a decade later, my old map had gained new relevance. Road repair workers were reconstituting its long-lost paper reality. Checkpoints had disappeared, tourist hotels mushroomed, and in the evening the middle class shoppers, temple visitors and musical performers made curfews a distant memory. It did not require much ethnographic instinct, however, to sense that the government mantra of triumph, unity and progress rang hollow for many of the region's inhabitants, who felt humiliated and worried, despite improved security. Interviews with bureaucrats, as I discovered, were remarkably similar to what they had been, although their cryptic linguistic ways of circumventing controversial issues were now used to convey their disapproval and anxieties about post-war militarization and minority discrimination.

The transition that took place between these two visits (in 2001 and 2010) raises a number of questions. How could public administration continue amidst a separatist war? What role did the civil service play in a conflict that pivoted on competing claims over sovereign rule? And what exactly changed when front-line civil servants became 'peacetime' bureaucrats? This article scrutinizes the interface between the armed conflict and public administration and, by extension, its conceptual alter ego — the state. Much has been written about the intimate links between state functioning and questions of war and peace. Dissatisfied with the limited analytical purchase of diagnosing war as 'state failure' or 'collapse', anthropologists, development scholars and political scientists have taken up the challenge to fathom the state in less essentialist and more contextualized ways. It is to that emerging body of work that this article hopes to contribute.

This literature steps away from the notion of the state as a thing, a unified actor, or a separate entity that governs society. Instead, it exposes the continuous processes of negotiation between different forms of authority and power that underlie the discursive and material reality that we designate 'the state'. The civil service plays an important role in that process. Rather than taking for granted the bureaucratic self-image of a rational collective that governs society, this article treats civil servants as human agents who continuously cross the state-society divide, and struggle to keep up the discursive portrayal of a systematic, rational and coherent state. That discourse is important, because it shapes and informs the everyday work of the civil service, but it obviously does not eliminate the widespread antithetical practice of bending rules and shifting affiliations. Reconciling apparently

coherent paper trails with convoluted ground realities is at the heart of what public administration does.

The empirical material presented in this article describes how the institutions, resources and discourse that carry the state's insignia became entangled in the struggle between the LTTE and the government. Contrary to what one might expect, the administration did not break down altogether. Rather, bureaucrats found themselves in the eye of the storm: they were at the core of what the conflict was about (the state and competing claims of sovereignty), but both parties allowed them to keep a minimal administration running. After the defeat of the LTTE, Tamil civil servants lost their counterweight against (Sinhala-dominated) directives from the capital and fell prey to a much greater degree of interference by local politicians. I thus argue that rule was and continues to be subject to struggle and compromise. What has changed are the cast of actors in that struggle and their relative bargaining positions.

The material collected for this research comes from a highly controversial context. This means that many of the nuances and concrete illustrations that the argument requires need to be obscured in order to protect the people featuring in this article. The fieldwork focused on two locations. Each of these so-called DS divisions comprised a 'borderland', where rebel and government authority grappled for control. I first encountered these areas at the end of what is known as 'Eelam War III', in 2000 and 2001. During the peace process and the resumption of war in the subsequent years I revisited the region, and in early 2010, after the defeat of the LTTE, I spent three months in and around these divisions, talking with civil servants, society leaders, politicians and other inhabitants about both the past and the present. The article draws strongly on the accounts of bureaucrats, who were now more willing to talk, but the overall analysis is corroborated by observations and the views of other interviewees over the years.¹

The article proceeds with a brief conceptual discussion on 'the state' and some contextual background on public administration and the separatist war in Sri Lanka. It then presents the empirical core of the article — the functioning of the civil service during (2001) and after the war (2010) — and finally draws some conclusions.

1. In the two DS divisions studied, I triangulated my findings with the present administrative heads (Divisional Secretaries), and their predecessors from the early 1990s onwards. I also met with the respective district heads (Government Agents), some of their predecessors and a number of bureaucrats in associated offices. In addition to these two sites, I draw from observations and interviews elsewhere in the Eastern Province. I also had the opportunity to interview people placed in high-level positions, including former President Chandrika Kumaratunga and top-level military commanders. The main fieldwork (2010) comprised 136 interviews, of which thirty-five interviews with twenty-five different bureaucrats and ten interviews with six different politicians. In addition, the analysis builds on observations and interviews with a wide range of players (including the LTTE) during various research trips to the region over the past decade.

RETHINKING 'THE STATE' IN RELATION TO WAR

This article places the civil service against the background of the vast and growing literature problematizing the notion of 'the state'. This brief conceptual introduction highlights four points.

First, it is unhelpful to treat the ensemble that we call 'the state' as a unified entity that is superior to or otherwise separate from society (Abrams, 1988 [1977]; Das and Poole, 2004; Hansen and Stepputat, 2001; Migdal, 2001; Mitchell, 1991; Spencer, 2007). The state *as a coherent and rational actor* only exists as an idea. In similar vein, the civil service is not a rational, hierarchical and coherent instrument of rule. Rather than the loyal implementing arm of political decision makers or the elevated class of rational administrators, civil servants are themselves societal agents that broker strategic relations with a wide range of actors. Situated between multiple pressures and interests, they continuously strive to navigate or reconcile the contradictions conjured up by their superiors, political leaders, companies, lobby groups, informal networks and so on (Bierschenk, 2010; Gupta, 1995; Heady, 1991; Huber, 2007). They try to mould unruly, incoherent or transgressive practices into the frame of impersonal, systematic rule.

Second, the idea that the state is the coherent institutional embodiment of sovereign rule may be mythical, but that myth remains crucially important. The state idea is remarkably persistent in people's discursive ordering of society and the qualities they attribute to governance. The state and its many tentacles are such an important discursive hallmark, that people have difficulty imagining their society without it, and this often equips state structures, officials and policies with an aura of legitimacy, authority and naturalness (Abrams, 1988 [1977]; Hansen and Stepputat, 2001; Mitchell, 1991). This has very practical and concrete manifestations. In the case of Sri Lanka, Amarasuriya (2010) describes civil servants with very little actual power and poor salaries. Still people queue up to join the civil service, they are proud to be part of it, and they earn much respect from their social environment, simply because they represent 'the state'. Moreover, Amarasuriya's bureaucrats see themselves as naturally responsible for caring about citizens and as superior to their NGO colleagues. Hansen's study on Mumbai describes a similar bureaucratic persona:

The bureaucrat, the planner, the scientist, the member of the Indian Administrative Service — the heavily mythologized 'steel-frame' of the state — occupy crucial positions in contemporary political imaginaries, not least for the larger middle class. The bureaucrat was for decades the hero of modern India and, until the 1970s, was depicted in Hindi films as a man of character and insight. (Hansen, 2001: 37)

The institutional structures of the state, the services or resources they deliver, and the accompanying discourse of rational, impersonal procedures are constructed as natural and important. They render technical what may

be very political, thus legitimizing or disguising the particular agendas they propagate.

Third, the authority vested in state institutions, resources and discourse is not easily monopolized. The idea that orderly images and practices of the state are in fact 'power in disguise' features prominently in a much broader body of work inspired by Foucault ('governmentality') and Gramsci ('hegemony'). Importantly, however, these images and practices are not the exclusive privilege of governments or ruling classes; they are available to anyone with sufficient power to use them. State institutions, resources and discourse are not, I argue, the prerogative of the 'dominant'. Those who 'resist' — community representatives, rebel movements, or others — may use the same instruments. Li's (1999) work on Indonesia is insightful here. The 'actual accomplishment of rule', she points out, is highly 'contingent' and 'compromised' (ibid.: 295), because state practices are themselves enmeshed in resistance. When observed from close by, the attributes of the state do not destroy, but deploy agency; they do not end antagonism, but get embroiled in it.

We thus need to look more closely at the way people make strategic use of state institutions, resources and discourses. Christian Lund (2006b) provides a useful conceptual springboard. His term 'twilight institutions' emphasizes that different institutions (state and non-state) mix and blend. At one point, people use them to represent the state; the next moment they act in direct contradiction to it. People move from one institution to another, but carry along symbols, authority or rules. Lund observes that many local groups present themselves as the antithesis of the state, but subsequently adopt parts of it, or use very state-like symbols and strategies. Similarly, civil servants often act both on behalf of and in contradiction to the state (for interesting recent case studies see Berenschot, 2010; Schroven, 2010).

Fourth, the above observations become particularly pronounced in the context of armed conflict, where both the imaginary and the material reality of the state tend to be contested. The history of state formation often surfaces saliently in the causation of contemporary armed conflicts (Cliffe and Luckham, 1999; Richmond, 2005; Rotberg, 2003). Conversely, the state — however defined — plays a central role in transitions from war to peace (e.g. UN, 2010). This has led to the diagnosis of war as 'state failure' or 'collapse', while 'state building' became a policy term for the recovery from war (for an engaged but critical discussion, see Chandler, 2006; Paris, 2004; Richmond, 2005). All along, however, there has been a level of dissatisfaction with the applied and prescriptive literature in this field (see among others the sequence of special issues in this journal: Hagmann and Péclard, 2010a; Lund, 2006a; Milliken, 2002). In similar vein, there is an emerging literature on South Asia, which highlights everyday manifestations of the state in the context of armed contestation (Gellner, 2007; Hansen and Stepputat, 2001; Shah and Pettigrew, 2009; Vandekerckhove, 2011). State

functioning is indeed a pivotal factor in understanding armed conflicts, but terms like state failure and technical prescriptions of ‘capacity building’ to ‘re-establish governance’ miss the point when they steer clear of the issues discussed above. As aptly put by David Gellner (2007: 3) in the Nepali context: ‘State and resistance go together’. We thus need to look at the way local power holders use and co-opt state institutions, resources and the discourse of bureaucratic order, and how this produces hybrid, compromised forms of rule.

As we will see in the Sri Lankan case below, there are important differences between a wartime and a post-war civil service, but they have little to do with a complete breakdown of public administration during the war or a reconstitution of uniform rule after the government victory. Contestation and bargaining continue throughout. What changes are the dynamics of negotiation and the role of violence, the cast of brokers, and their relative bargaining positions.

SRI LANKA: SETTING THE STAGE

Unlike some of the oft-cited examples in the debate around state failure, Sri Lanka does not have large areas with thinly spread bureaucrats whose rule relies on co-opting whatever form of local authority they encounter. Its fine-grained civil service stretches out to the village level across the entire country. Sri Lanka also has a long track record of democratic changes of government and a functioning public welfare system.² It is thus not a case of a poorly institutionalized or absent state. Yet, the country is also characterized by a highly politicized and ethnicized patronage system and a history of violent rebellions.

Sri Lanka’s Civil Service

As elsewhere in South Asia, Sri Lanka’s administrative structure is a colonial legacy. Its main tenets date back to British rule: a countrywide civil service with administrative districts headed by a Government Agent (GA) who operates from a compound called the *Kachcheri* (typically a colonial fort) (Raby, 1985). Lower levels of the administration — Divisional Secretaries (DS) and Grama Sevakas (GS) — were added in the twentieth century. Whilst these officers continue to form the administrative backbone, the system has become a great deal more complicated in recent decades with a large number of ministries and the creation of Provincial Councils, local councils (Pradesha Sabhas) and associated bureaucracies. Table 1 provides a simplified overview.

2. As a general indication, Sri Lanka ranks 91st on the 2010 Human Development Index (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>).

Table 1. Sub-National Administrative Levels

Level	Chief administrative bureaucrat	Elected body
Village/ward	Grama Sevaka (GS)	None ^a
Division	Divisional Secretary (DS)	Pradesha Sabha
District	Government Agent (GA)	None ^b
Province	Chief Secretary ^c	Provincial Council

Notes:

a: Informally, so-called Rural Development Societies play this role.

b: National MPs are elected through district constituencies and thus play a key brokering role.

c: The GA relates directly to the central administration and is therefore seen as more powerful than the Chief Secretary of a province. The latter administers a larger area, but generally has less authority.

The elite corps of the administration — about 1800 DSs, GAs and senior central government officers³ — are known as the Sri Lanka Administrative Service (SLAS), the successor of the colonial Ceylon Civil Service. In this article I confine myself to these officers.⁴ Although most SLAS officers have little actual power, Sri Lanka's society is saturated with their involvement. Many activities, procedures or transactions (both by other state officials and by civilians) require their signature. SLAS officers enjoy a high level of respect, and they themselves do not tire of extolling the virtues of the competitive exam through which only the most qualified are recruited. Everyday practice, however, is not always in line with this elevated *esprit the corps*. Post-independence democracy injected elected politicians and parties into the local arena, and this generated a dynamic of politico-bureaucratic competition and convergence. SLAS officers are torn between 'political interference', expectations from 'known faces' (Raby, 1985) in their personal network, and the need to uphold efficient, impersonal rule.

War and 'the State'

The Sri Lankan studies literature attributes a central role to 'the state' in the country's history, and scholarly analysis suggests a strong link between the Tamil separatist conflict and the state-formation process. In a nutshell, state structures, policies and symbolism developed a majoritarian bias after independence. 'Ethnic outbidding' between competing Sinhala leaders resulted in minority discrimination, through policies on language and religion, job opportunities, university admission, land administration and so on

3. According to the Ministry of Public Administration, there are 1820 SLAS officers: 993 class III, 167 class II, and 660 class I (as of 1 December 2010) (<http://www.pubad.gov.lk>).

4. Plausibly, the role of other state officials is different. Whereas the SLAS are primarily administrators — and thus register, document and approve much of the work done by other state officials — other departments (e.g. irrigation, roads, health) deliver services and control significant resources. This has implications for how they are perceived and for how the LTTE dealt with them.

(see Moore, 1985; Uyangoda, 2007; Venugopal, 2009). This strengthened ethno-nationalist sentiments among the Tamil minority (and the Muslims to a lesser extent), who saw themselves as increasingly marginalized and oppressed.

There are grounds for these minority anxieties and this article does not seek to contest them, but it would be a mistake to conclude that 'the state' is altogether biased and 'Sinhalized'. Sinhala nationalists lard their political claims with state symbols, policies and institutions. Their Tamil opponents provide the logical mirror image by portraying the Sri Lankan state as a 'neo-colonial' and 'oppressive' Sinhala entity. But on closer scrutiny, the state's performance fails to mould completely with this ethnic framing. First, this view does not account for the many fissures and conflicts within Sinhala society. This was most dramatically manifest in the Sinhala Marxist uprisings against the polity in the 1970s and 1980s led by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, but there are in fact many entrenched political divides that trouble state-society relations in Sinhala-dominated areas. State institutions, resources and discourses are captured for contradictory agendas and the orderly image of the state is constantly challenged by 'dissonance and transgression' (Spencer, 2007: 116).

Second, 'the Sri Lankan state' cannot simply be pitted against Tamil minority grievances and separatism. Notwithstanding discriminatory policies and practices, state institutions, resources and discourse are an important component of Tamil society. Tamils and (Tamil speaking) Muslims, representing 13 per cent and 9 per cent of Sri Lanka's total population respectively,⁵ form the majority in the north and east of the country. There is little detailed literature about the way north-eastern communities were engulfed in development, 'governmentalization' and political appropriation in colonial and post-independence decades, but there is a rich body of research on developments after war broke out in the 1980s (see, for example, Gaasbeek, 2010; Goodhand et al., 2000; Korf and Fünfgeld, 2006; Korf et al., 2010). These analyses highlight that different state institutions played divergent and sometimes contradictory roles in the war zone. The conceptualization of state institutions, services and discourse as attributes that lend themselves for multiple use is helpful here, as it sheds light on the paradoxical roles of the civil service. Rather than a war against the state, the LTTE's struggle also took place within and through state structures. The government and the rebels both made use of the same 'twilight institutions' and repertoires, but for contradictory ends.

The War-Ridden North and East

The war between the central government and the Tamil separatists became manifest in the north and east through competing projects of rule (Fuglerud,

5. Author's calculation on the basis of 2007 Census data.

2009; Sarvananthan, 2007; Stokke, 2006; Uyangoda, 2007), or 'governable orders' (Korf et al., 2010). Importantly, the rivalry over state institutions, resources and symbols was not a mere side effect of the secessionist war, a tactical civil offshoot of a military confrontation. Rather, it was at the core of the conflict. The LTTE started as a guerrilla outfit in the 1970s and 1980s, but evolved into an institutionalized movement capable of territorial control and public surveillance in the 1990s. A remarkable geography of government and rebel-controlled territory emerged. In the north, the LTTE controlled a large, contiguous swath of territory known as the Vanni. It was here that their military strength was concentrated and their grip on civilian life was known to be firmest. In the east of the country, territorial control was more fragmented. Never itself a centre of power, the east coast had always been a borderland, where different spheres of influence clashed and mingled, and that is still true today (Gaasbeek, 2010). The Eastern Province is also the most ethnically mixed region of the country; Sri Lanka's three main communities (Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims) are all represented in the region,⁶ but each of the three districts of the province (Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara) has a distinct ethnic balance. Patterns of LTTE and government control were shaped by this geography of ethnic pockets along the east coast.

Both in the north and east, the rebels established judicial entities (police force, courts), financial structures (tax collection, banks), mass media (mainly radio), and state-like symbols (flag, anthem, ceremonies) in the territory they controlled. The government called these 'uncleared areas'. In 'cleared areas' the military was dominant, but the LTTE had a strong covert presence and influence. Alongside their own organizational structures, the rebels co-opted the state bureaucracy into their strife for control and legitimacy. Particularly in the east, where 'cleared' and 'uncleared' areas were more interspersed, older patterns of competition became entangled with the struggle between government and LTTE in the form of clientelistic rivalry (Korf, 2006), livelihood conflicts between ethnic groups (Gaasbeek, 2010; Korf, 2004), competing control over environmental resources (Bohle and Fünfgeld, 2007; Korf and Fünfgeld, 2006), or the political economy at large (Goodhand et al., 2000). It is therefore unhelpful to view Sri Lanka's war zone just in terms of failure, breakdown and oppression. Rather, war transformed social relations, fault lines and power structures. This article focuses on the east coast, but the general dynamic in the north was similar. Government servants continued to work in the 'uncleared' parts of the north, grappling with pressure from both sides. However, the available evidence suggests there was less space for manoeuvre in this region: LTTE rule was more pervasive in the north, there were fewer alternative sources of power,

6. For the Eastern Province as a whole, the figures are 40.4 per cent Tamils, 37.6 per cent Muslims, 21.6 per cent Sinhalese and 0.4 per cent other groups, according to 2007 Census figures.

and the rebel-held area (the Vanni) was almost exclusively Tamil, as were the civil servants.⁷

In the east, the civil service reflected the ethnic geography. There were Sinhalese GSs and DSs in Sinhala areas and Tamil and Muslim officers elsewhere. Tamils were over-represented in mixed Tamil–Muslim areas, mainly because fewer Muslims had joined the SLAS in the past. This study focuses on the coast, where almost all officers are Tamil or Muslim, although the two districts with a significant (but minority) Sinhala population — Trincomalee and Ampara — invariably had Sinhalese GAs. While these high-level bureaucrats came from elsewhere in the country, the Tamil and Muslim SLAS officers usually originated from the east, though some came from Jaffna or the highlands. They typically belonged to the petty bourgeoisie or middle class of provincial towns like Trincomalee or Batticaloa. Almost all were men, they were well educated and spoke fluent English. There was a generational gap among them: those recruited before the war were mostly born in the 1940s and were now very senior ('Class I'); those hired after the 2002 ceasefire were typically born in the 1970s and had a lower rank ('Class III'). There were very few officers in between, because so few entry exams had been held during the war. With occasional glorifying reference to the SLAS's colonial antecedents, bureaucrats described their colleagues (and by implication themselves) as hard-working, efficient, orderly, courageous and innovative. They saw themselves as committed to serving the common people. 'Otherwise the people will suffer', was the common phrase when they admitted that they sometimes bent the rules. Of course, they were also career-minded and most were well endowed with the bureaucratic instinct of risk aversion.

The period studied in this article was a particularly turbulent one. In 2002, a newly elected government (led by Prime Minister Wickremesinghe) signed a ceasefire with the LTTE. Subsequent peace talks sparked hope, but soon broke down (2003). A period of no-war-no-peace followed in which military and political dynamics were further complicated by a split in the LTTE (2004) and the tsunami (2004). War resumed in 2006, at high human cost, and ended with the defeat of the LTTE, first in the east (2007) and then in the country at large (2009). In parallel with the end of the war, significant changes took place in Sri Lanka's political configuration, with an increasingly unchallenged, triumphant government led by President Rajapaksa. Each of these developments had major implications for the civil service in eastern Sri Lanka: security conditions, political dynamics and available resources all changed rapidly (see for example Korf, 2006). However, rather than unravelling each of the time periods within this decade of transition, this article grapples with the longer-term shift. The following two sections provide a more in-depth analysis of the civil service in two moments in

7. This was in part a result of LTTE coercion: Muslims, for example, were driven out of certain areas.

time: in 2001, just before the ceasefire, and in 2010, during the immediate aftermath of the war.

WAR-TIME CIVIL SERVICE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

Serving 'Two Governments'

During the war, civil servants had to operate in the contested geography of LTTE and government control. In the words of one civil servant, 'there were two governments in this area'. Bureaucrats could not afford to alienate either hierarchy. Particularly Tamil civil servants were closely scrutinized by the rebels. They could not — and often did not want to — betray 'the Tamil cause'. In 'cleared areas', the LTTE operated parts of the civil service by 'remote control', as one respondent phrased it. Through letters, phone calls and informants, the rebels communicated their wishes about sensitive appointments, building contracts and resource allocations. The central administration and the military knew about these practices and as a result, bureaucrats in the north and east — Tamils in particular — were treated with suspicion if not open contempt. 'We couldn't trust the civil administration', a former member of the army's high command confirmed to me. 'Sri Lanka was a place where we were fighting an enemy, while our own government was feeding them. But we couldn't starve our own people'.

Rather than mere benevolence, there was a clear political strategy at stake here. In an interview, former President Chandrika Kumaratunga⁸ explained to me: 'We tried to win over the hearts and the minds of the Tamil people. . . . We were trying to weaken the LTTE by doing something for the Tamil people'. By offering help, she hoped Tamil youth would 'start wondering: why should we kill ourselves for [LTTE leader] Prabhakaran?'. The government thus continued to deliver *samurdhi* (poverty alleviation, mainly in the form of food) to the rebel-controlled areas, and eased restrictions on aid provided by international agencies. A rudimentary administration remained operational throughout the war-torn region. Schoolteachers, engineers and administrators continued to receive their salaries, because this underpinned the government's claim that it embodied the sole, sovereign and legitimate state on the island. Assistance, however meagre, crossed the heavily guarded military checkpoints and front lines.

How much credit the government actually got for these efforts is a different matter. In the LTTE controlled areas, it did not have much traction. The rebels co-opted bureaucrats, village organizations and other institutions. Some funds were kept in LTTE offices or banks and key decisions would require LTTE endorsement. Even in 'cleared areas', government officers

8. Chandrika Kumaratunga was president from 1994 till 2005 and was succeeded by Mahinda Rajapaksa.

received instructions from the LTTE. They were simultaneously the tentacles of the government's attempt to preserve the Sri Lankan unitary state, and the go-between for the direct opposite: a separate LTTE state. Serving as the interface for two oppositional entities, civil servants tried to reconcile this contentious practice with the orderly tenets of bureaucratic life. They continued to present themselves as rational administrators with an *esprit de corps* of aptitude, righteousness, discipline, duty and caring for the common people.

'Keeping the Files Clean'

To preserve their own position in this messy reality of 'two governments', several bureaucrats confided that they kept a shadow administration for decisions, correspondence and agreements that did not match the official procedure — to 'keep the files clean', one of them said, in case they would be audited. A Muslim administrator cited the example of a community building that had been constructed in an LTTE area:

They [the LTTE] sent a letter saying [it] had been completed and instructing us to transfer the funds to the account of the RDS [Rural Development Association]. Of course that letter did not go into the formal file. That was in the shadow administration. One time there was a building scheduled in [one village], but the LTTE wanted it in [another village]. So we arranged that and got the documents in order. We put a before date [backdated the document], as if it had always been that way. Otherwise they [the government] will blame us.

Similar strategies were applied with contracting. It is standard procedure that construction is put out for tender, to select the cheapest contractor. In LTTE areas, only contractors with rebel permission would submit a bid. The DS would be informed which company was to be selected. But again, on paper the procedure would be in order. One Muslim bureaucrat explained:

If a contractor got a certain job, [the LTTE] would tell them 'give us the money and we'll do the work for you'. Then they would do some things, but meanwhile keep part of the funds for their terrorist activities. The first payment, second payment and final payment would come and all the reporting would be there. Document wise it's okay. But much of the money would disappear. We simply passed on the documents.

There are numerous variants to this tendency to 'hide' behind bureaucratic façades. Another example involved the shifting of responsibilities to other people. A retired Tamil officer explained how he would make others complicit in decision making in the District Development Committee, a powerful forum in which many different institutions are represented:

All officers would be there, the army, the grassroots officers who would pass the message to the LTTE, everyone. I would tell the meeting openly about the situation. To the rupee accurate, this is our budget for this for that, so that everyone would know, the army and the

grassroots officers. And they may talk to the LTTE. That is a different matter. But nobody can blame me. I had provided all the information openly. So everyone knew. Transparency is number one.

Interestingly, this quote shows how a typical governance term (transparency) is used to rationalize collaboration with a proscribed organization. Bureaucrats used similar arguments to legitimize their ways of obeying the LTTE. For example, they emphasized that it is standard procedure to base decisions on information and suggestions provided by GSs. They knew full well that in 'uncleared areas', these village-level officers served as a mouthpiece for the insurgents. When they wanted to assure themselves of the LTTE position, they would call the GS to their offices, but rather than saying they collaborated with the LTTE, they told me: 'We have to consult with the GSs. That's the normal procedure. You can't change that set up'. A retired Sinhala GA explained that his inferiors would not directly resist his orders or tell him that the LTTE would disapprove. Rather they would suggest, 'shall we do it this way', because the 'ground situation is like this', and he played along with that. Civil servants thus maintained a framework of bureaucratic order to enable transgressive, or even illegal, practices, whilst preserving their own position.

Postings and Transfers: Condonation from Both Sides

This tacit acceptance from the higher echelons of the government administration was reflected in civil service posting patterns. Transfers are an everyday phenomenon in Sri Lanka. Alongside routine placements and promotions, many transfers are in fact disciplinary measures against officers who have contravened policy or aligned themselves with the wrong politicians. Therefore, it is all the more surprising that the DSs in the two divisions I studied had stayed put for ten years or more, while five years is the conventional term. In view of the collaboration with the LTTE, it would not have been difficult to find grounds for transfer. The DSs explained why this did not happen. First, the government realized the officers had little choice, so transfers would not have solved the problem. Their replacements would have to face the LTTE as well. Second, there was hardly anyone to replace these officers. My respondents claimed Tamils had faced difficulty getting state employment, due to poor education and cancelling of entrance exams in the war zone, but they suspected discriminatory selection as well. Equally important, the qualified Tamil officers that were available often preferred to work in a major town, rather than in a contested borderland. A small group of senior officers kept filling the peripheral postings and even after they retired, many were asked to re-enrol.

The LTTE adopted a similar stance. They distrusted civil servants, because they were part of the state hierarchy, my informants explained. Cadres

would address bureaucrats as inferiors, 'not politely or with respect', thus contravening the custom of respecting older, well-educated government officers. But at the end of the day, the rebels accepted that bureaucrats had a role to play. One very senior SLAS officer said the LTTE told him to hoist the LTTE flag at one of their public rallies. 'I said, I can come but then I have to resign my job. . . . To enter into something political, I am required to resign. That's the general principle'. He called their bluff. Smilingly: 'They said no, you stay in place'. Generally, he added, 'the LTTE was not unreasonable. They needed us to function. Because they also had to face the people'. Other bureaucrats agreed; the LTTE would be intimidating and give them orders, but they usually condoned the officers remaining in post, running a rudimentary administration, and delivering the minimal level of services that seeped through government restrictions.

The civil service in the war-affected east of Sri Lanka thus became a structure that accommodated both rebel and government influence. The situation was pervaded by fear and coercion, but the public sector was not crushed between the two parties. The administration continued, albeit at a minimal level, because it was in no one's interest to completely disable it. Civil servants were at the centre of the conflict — competition over the nature of the state — but at ground level, both parties compromised and left administrators some space to do their work. Almost all bureaucrats agreed they could get some things done, because the war 'insulated' them. Officers from all three ethnic backgrounds in fact argued that in some respects the bureaucracy in the east worked better than in other parts of the country, where the civil service fell prey to 'political interference'. Muslim politicians — typically the most powerful in the east, because they managed to secure ministerial portfolios — were hesitant to interfere with the bureaucracy outside the Muslim-dominated pockets, since the LTTE had killed some of them in the 1980s. Tamil MPs would try to influence decisions, but they were very cautious and would not contradict LTTE wishes. In other parts of the country, politicians have more weight: their orders and their thuggery trump other dynamics. But in the east (like the north), a more powerful struggle was going on: the war between the LTTE and the government. Moreover, with limited investment and central government restrictions, there was less to gain from interfering with the bureaucracy in the northeast.

The narrative so far reconstructs the situation in 2000 and 2001, the simmering end of 'Eelam war III'. It was not always that way. Testimony from retired bureaucrats shows that the early stages of the war were quite different. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the compromise and insulation described above had not yet emerged. The LTTE was a less well-organized guerrilla movement, the government military was less tolerant towards the civil administration, and the public sector had great difficulty sustaining itself. In one of the districts, my informants could think of three DSs who were killed by the LTTE in the 1980s, 'because they were working for the government', while none had been assassinated in this district since. In the

course of the 1990s, both sides apparently came to see the strategic benefits of a functioning bureaucracy. Nor did the fragile equilibrium hold in the period after 2001. As mentioned, the period 2002 to 2009 was a turbulent time of peace talks, political re-positioning and re-engagement in war, culminating in the defeat of the LTTE. That last event marked the main turning point in recent Sri Lankan history; this article therefore proceeds directly to the post-war situation of 2010.

POST-WAR CIVIL SERVICE: THE RETURN OF 'NORMAL' SRI LANKAN POLITICS

After the LTTE defeat, the government intensified its normalization efforts to consolidate its victory. Checkpoints were lifted, infrastructure was expanded and it became easier for people to travel around. Whilst these processes visibly improved the general living conditions in the area, they also raised controversy around minority rights and Sinhala domination or 'colonization' of the east.

Dancing to the Government's Tune

The LTTE collapse freed the bureaucracy from a long-time source of fear and coercion. By the same token, however, civil servants also lost their counterweight to government policy and interference from local political entrepreneurs like Pradesha Sabha chairmen and MPs. This shift was reinforced by the soaring political strength of the Rajapaksa government after the military victory in May 2009. Other political parties lost bargaining space and there was limited room for dissent throughout the country. Although the level of centralization (and militarization) of political power and patronage under the Rajapaksa family was unprecedented, many elements of post-war politics were in fact a familiar theme in most of Sri Lanka. These included the centralized polity, patronage games and local strong men using their ties with the centre to interfere with the public administration. In the north and east these forces had been attenuated by the war. After the LTTE collapsed, that changed. 'Now we have to dance to the political tune again', said a retired civil servant. 'During the war, they could not just push us into compliance'. Earlier, bureaucrats would at least be respected for trying to do their duty, one of his colleagues added: 'Now it is different. The government does not want us to do our duty. They just want us to do whatever they say'.

Two sets of changes invoked particular concern among Tamil (and Muslim) civil servants in the Eastern Province. The first was the creation of tourism zones, 'High Security Zones' and 'Special Economic Zones'. These projects displaced (mainly Tamil) populations from their lands and there was

a pervasive fear for the large influx of Sinhala and foreign entrepreneurs. The Tamil civil servants I interviewed across the region were highly distrustful of these efforts, but there was little they could do against them. The Special Economic Zone in Sampur, near Trincomalee town, covers an area that used to be an LTTE hub during the war. Upon conquering the stronghold, which is strategic because it lies directly opposite the commercial and navy harbour, the military declared it a High Security Zone. When this became a Special Economic Zone, a power plant and a steel plant (to be built by an Indian and an Australian company, respectively) were envisaged, but it remained unclear what was actually happening on the ground (Fonseka and Raheem, 2009). Checkpoints and tall barbed wire fences surrounded the area and no civilians were allowed to enter. The zone escaped the grasp of the civilian administration altogether. While the responsible DS was struggling to find alternative lands for the displaced population, he was not allowed to enter the zone and had no influence on what happened there. 'This comes from the highest level', the civil servants in the DS office explained, 'that can't be opposed'. Ironically, they had continued working in this area when the LTTE was in control, but they were completely kept out now that their own government was in charge.

Meanwhile, people were alarmed by the circulation of planning documents for prospective tourism sites along the coast. Some were to cater for large numbers of new 'five star' or 'boutique' hotels. Economic inputs were welcome in the deprived region, but the coastline is traditionally densely populated and of great importance for fisheries. Land is scarce and sensitive. There is a long list of disputes involving localized land conflicts, the history of 'Sinhala colonization', the declaration of Buddhist 'sacred sites' and, more recently, tsunami resettlement. Large-scale allocations of valuable land to luxury hotels of Sinhala-led companies were thus a controversial issue.

The bureaucratic procedure for alienating state land is complicated and involves many different actors. Political expediency trumped these checks and balances, however. A local representative told me that he did not want to sign for approval, but officials higher up the chain called him into their office and told him: 'This goes above you. This project comes from the Executive Presidency. You have to sign'. And thus the memo he signed said: 'we do not have any objections'. It specified some standardized conditions (such as an environmental impact assessment), but mentioned nothing about minority concerns or land issues. The official's file did, however, contain a letter stating that the 'District Land Use Committee has considered all aspects regarding land matters'. The tradition of keeping the files clean thus continued, but with a different objective. Where it was previously used to enable rebel interference, now it was used to disable popular dissent. And in both periods, it helped bureaucrats to keep their jobs in troubled times.

Postings and Transfers: Petty Politicians Make their Comeback

The second major change was the resurgence of local politicians (MPs or Ministers from the area, Provincial Councillors or Ministers, and Pradesha Sabha chairmen). The end of the war cleared the way for new political strategies, particularly for those who aligned themselves with the government. A new set of players also entered the scene, because of new elections to the Eastern Provincial Council (which had been a mere bureaucratic structure before) and because Sinhalese politicians from outside the region joined the race for a parliamentary seat in an eastern constituency. During the first post-war parliamentary elections (in April 2010), the campaigning candidates showed their political muscle in a way that their predecessors had been unable to do. Long caravans of buses, lorries, vans and three-wheelers travelled from stage to stage, each displaying massive pictures of the politicians. It was said of one of the Sinhala candidates, Susantha Poonchanilama, that asphalt emerged wherever he trod. A Muslim academic in Ampara District told me what it was like to receive him. 'When he left, he said "oh, your road is not in good shape. You need a nicer one."' And in seven days — seven days! — we had a concrete road. After all those years of asking our own politicians at the Pradesha Sabha!'. The candidate had smartly tapped into the inability of the existing eastern polity to quickly deliver resources. In another town, which has traditionally elected Muslim MPs, a well-respected citizen told me that Poonchanilama had the local police commander replaced on request of the people and called up the GA (the highest official in the district) to pass on instructions. Within two days, work had started on roads and the electricity supply. 'He's like Spiderman', my respondent said, capturing the general air of astonishment. 'It's like magic to the people'.

Such efficient action is only possible by overruling bureaucratic procedures and indeed, that's what many civil servants — from all ethnic backgrounds — complained about. 'Ministers call me up', a local council secretary said. 'They tell me to work on this road first. Or they tell me to send some labourers to clean their house. If the audit comes, I have to account for that. . . . But if I refuse to go along with such requests, I'm in trouble'. A retired Sinhala GA endorsed his observation: 'Nowadays, you can't find a politician who does not interfere with the bureaucracy. They [named local Tamil politicians] did not do that. They were not so powerful. We were also very close to the president. The MPs knew that. Now it is different'. Of course there were local politicians during the war who tried to influence aid allocations and government spending (Korf, 2006), but the extent to which they could do so was much smaller than in the post-war period.

The resurgence of local politicians is also manifest in bureaucratic transfer patterns. The phase of long-term postings ended abruptly when LTTE control crumbled in the east. In parallel to the military offensive, Muslim politicians put their loyalists in place. Muslims were traditionally under-represented in the public sector and many mixed Tamil–Muslim areas were run by a Tamil

DS (partly because they were better able to face the LTTE). This was also the case in one of the divisions I studied. In 2005, the Tamil DS had been in place for a decade, but in the subsequent five years, the division saw five different DSs follow each other. This turbulent succession was set off by Muslim politicians who wanted a Muslim DS installed just after the December 2004 tsunami, when aid started pouring in. This man assumed duties (transfer #1), but counts of corruption created trouble and his affiliates promoted him to an unrelated ministry. His Tamil deputy (#2) replaced him, but again Muslim politicians intervened and had a Muslim officer (#3) take over. He in turn had difficulty navigating the tensions between these politicians and the (Sinhala) military and GA. The GA transferred him. His deputy (#4) assumed duties, but was considered too junior. He was replaced by an older Tamil bureaucrat (#5) from a division elsewhere in the province. This transfer killed two birds with one stone, because the incoming DS had been evicted from his previous post after falling out with the Muslim politician in that division. That politician was happy to explain the problem to me. As a Muslim representative, he felt insufficient tsunami aid was reaching the Muslims. But the DS was a bureaucratic man: ‘he would play by the rules’. So the politician met with a powerful political ally in Colombo and two months later, the DS was transferred.

Not all divisions witnessed quite as rapid a turnover of administrators, but the growing influence of politicians was ubiquitous. The presidential elections in January 2010, for example, were followed by a wave of transfers of seemingly random lower level officers in the areas that had voted for the opposition. Without exception, the people I interviewed argued that political

Table 2. *Main Differences between 2001 and 2010*

	2001	2010
Context	Last phase Eelam war III Few resources Insecurity	Government victory over LTTE More resources Little overt violence
Political force field and ‘state projects’	Navigating between central government and LTTE Somewhat insulated from political interference; few transfers	Taking directives from a triumphant Rajapaksa government; LTTE counterweight collapsed Rife with political interference; numerous transfers
Room for manoeuvre and bureaucratic discourse	‘In the eye of the storm’ Heavy pressure, but tacit acceptance to keep minimal administration running ‘Keeping the files clean’, to disguise and legitimate collaboration with LTTE	‘Dancing to the government tune’ Forced to implement controversial measures like tourism zones and Special Economic Zones Still ‘keeping the files clean’, but now to steamroll and disguise dissent and contestation

interference had soared after the war. They were convinced that the demise of the LTTE — which had previously acted against ‘corrupt’ bureaucrats and politicians — was an important reason. The decline of checks and balances under the triumphant Rajapaksa government and the increasing presence of patronage — post-tsunami aid and post-war infrastructural projects had raised the stakes — further reinforced this trend. Civil servants also emphasized the advantages: with all the funds available and the improved security conditions, they had more means to assist people and nurture the improvement of their living standards.

There were thus remarkable changes and continuities in civil service functioning between the war and post-war period. Table 2 provides a summary.

CONCLUSION

This article has described how civil servants in eastern Sri Lanka navigated the turbulent transition from separatist war to the government’s military victory. The public administration was not a mere victim of war: bureaucratic postings, administrative endorsement, and the delivery of basic services and infrastructure continued (with some constraints) across the front line. SLAS officers navigated the contradictory state projects of the government (Sri Lanka) and the rebels (Tamil Eelam) and managed to reconcile this practice with the appearance of rational bureaucratic order. Neither was the public administration an unambiguous winner in the post-war context. Security conditions improved and new resources became available, but the public administration also faced new difficulties, as the region became more permeable for ‘normal’ Sri Lankan politics. In the absence of the LTTE, bureaucrats lost their counterweight against controversial government policies and interference by local politicians.

In line with the critical tenor of much of the recent literature on this subject (Das and Poole, 2004; Gellner, 2007; Hagmann and Péclard, 2010b; Hansen and Stepputat, 2001; Migdal, 2001), this article has treated state institutions, state resources and the orderly discourse associated with them as negotiated entities that provide a sense of legitimacy and authority. Two important observations emerged. The first concerns the way bureaucratic order naturalizes power. Post-war, the Sri Lankan government used the appearance of proper procedure and consultation, documented in memoranda, to push through controversial measures like the allocation of lands to a Sinhala-dominated tourism industry. This confirms what we already knew: state outfits can render political issues technical and thus legitimize rule and disguise domination. However, the government has no monopoly on this strategy. During the war, the LTTE did something similar. Civil servants legitimized rebel influence on decision making with quintessentially statist notions, such as the procedure of consulting GSs (who then spoke on behalf of the LTTE), keeping ‘clean’ files, and holding ‘transparent’ meetings. The

rebels assumed 'remote control' over state institutions, resources and the discourse of proper procedure to bolster their own struggle for legitimacy against the government. Rendering technical can be a subaltern strategy too. The state insigne naturalizes power, but this applies to divergent and competing forms of power.

Second, projects of rule are subject to blending, dilution and thus compromise. The work of Lund ('twilight institutions') and Li ('compromised rule') is helpful here. Despite its institutionalized hierarchies, the civil service is not just a singularly top-down mechanism. The SLAS in eastern Sri Lanka served as an outreach channel for two competing state projects at the same time. The government continued to pay salaries and deliver rudimentary state services to sustain its claim on sovereignty. The LTTE co-opted these same institutions and resources to administer Tamil Eelam. The line between 'the state' and 'the insurgents' comprised a whole set of shifting boundaries within the civil service. Both attempts at sovereign rule were implicated by these contradictions. State institutions, resources and symbols are at the very core of Sri Lanka's three decades of armed conflict, but while the protagonists could never negotiate a formal compromise, that was precisely what emerged at ground level. In that sense, civil servants operated in the eye of the storm. They were buffeted by strong winds from both sides, sometimes circumventing, sometimes complying with instructions from either the central government or the LTTE. However, neither the government nor the LTTE went all the way to enforce exclusive loyalty. At the end of the day, the rebels did not kill them and the government did not sack or transfer them. The end of the war heralded major changes in the everyday life of eastern bureaucrats, but their work continued to be subject to multiple pressures. The region became more susceptible to the kind of political interference from lower-level politicians that is common elsewhere in Sri Lanka (and in fact, many parts of South Asia).

The narrative presented in this article is reflective of a particular time (a highly turbulent decade culminating in the end of the war) and place (Sri Lanka's east coast with its multi-ethnic geography and its particular history). The pattern of confrontation and compromise between the government and the LTTE state project was different in the preceding period (e.g. the 1980s) and neighbouring regions (e.g. the north). This underlines the need for a fine-grained analysis that takes temporal and contextual specificities seriously. However, the analysis also shows that apparent dichotomies — for instance between war and peace, state and society, orderly administration and violent lawlessness — are unhelpful in grappling with these specificities. This opens up space to contrast and compare the story discussed here with a much wider spectrum of cases in which violent contestation over sovereignty or public authority gets enmeshed with the apparent order of bureaucratic rule. The general tenets of my findings tally well with recent and ongoing research elsewhere in South Asia. Studies on the localized realities of the 'people's war' in Nepal (e.g. Gellner, 2007), the contested borderlands of northeast

India (e.g. Vandekerckhove, 2011), the proliferation of Maoist, Naxalites and vigilante groups throughout the sub-continent (e.g. Sen, 2007; Shah and Pettigrew, 2009) show, in very similar ways, that purported state rule does not simply break down in the face of resistance or armed violence. Competing groups often sustain state institutions, resources and discourse, and co-opt them in their own projects of rule. And though there are important contextual differences, this happens both in war areas and post-war areas, as well as in regions plagued by less dramatic (but often very enduring) forms of political violence. A more thorough dialogue between these cases may help shed new light on the nature of these crises and efforts aimed at remedying them.

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Article 4

"The political geography of post-war transition: Re-territorialisation in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka", submitted to *Political Geography*.

The Political Geography of Post-War Transition: Re-Territorialisation in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

This article conceptualises the end of a war as a process of re-territorialisation. It does so with a case study of the transition from a war-time (2000) to post-war (2011) setting in Trincomalee, a multi-ethnic region on Sri Lanka's east coast. Building on work in political ecology and critical geopolitics, I venture to take a non-teleological perspective on the post-war political landscape, which gets rearticulated through resettlement processes, the refurbishment of sacred sites, soaring tourist arrivals, the proclamation of military zones, as well as changing patterns in religious conduct, youth behaviour and shifting social morals. Following a description of these turbulent developments in three specific sites, the article explores divergent local interpretations of these changes and concludes that they hinge on particular views on re-territorialisation: how space is demarcated, connected, inhabited and governed. Two central findings stand out. Firstly, re-territorialisation comprises the consolidation of the government's military victory. While some welcome this as peace-time 'development', others interpret it as a Sinhala-dominated state 'colonising' the island's northeastern frontier. Secondly, and more surprisingly, post-war re-territorialisation spawns the re-connection of a previously forlorn region. This propels a peace dividend – i.e. resettlement, security, mobility – but also incites concerns among all ethnic communities about exposure to the moral decay of a globalised world. While these findings are strongly context-bound, the conceptualisation of post-war transition as re-territorialisation resonates with the work of other political geographers, and promises to have wider analytical purchase on societies emerging from war.

INTRODUCTION

This article sets out to conceptualise the transition at the end of a war as a process of re-territorialisation. It aims to contribute to the research agenda on the geography of war and peace, propelled by the collections edited by Flint (2005), Kobayashi (2009), Kirsch & Flint (2011), and Nick Megoran's recent intervention in this journal (2011). Indeed, a geographical angle on war endings directs us to an important and promising scholarly terrain. However, I take issue with the teleological underpinnings associated with the term peace, which are particularly manifest in Megoran's plea. In an attempt to evade what I call the 'teleological trap', this article de-emphasises peace as an analytical entry point.

Instead, I engage with work on territorialisation in the field of political ecology (e.g. Peluso & Vandergeest, 2011) and recent forays in critical geopolitics (e.g. Kirsch & Flint, 2011). This literature provides a useful springboard for exploring post-war transition. The trope of territorialisation captures many important aspects of such a transition, including the struggles over territorial claims, the reconfiguration of boundaries, sites and zones, place-bound forms of authority and surveillance, and controversies over human displacement and return.

This article aims to complement geography's somewhat fragmented forays into post-war contexts with a case study of the recent transition in Trincomalee – a multi-ethnic region on Sri Lanka's east coast – after the defeat of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The empirical section first describes the turbulent changes in the three sites, and then explores people's divergent interpretations of these changes, as well as the controversies invoked by them. These narratives exhibit strong anxieties around Trincomalee's re-territorialisation, but of divergent sorts. In short, I argue there are two prevalent dynamics. First, post-war re-territorialisation comprises the consolidation of the government victory over the LTTE in Sri Lanka's northeastern frontier. There are diametrically opposed views on whether this process engenders 'peaceful development' or 'Sinhala colonisation'. While this first dynamic corroborates a familiar cadence of a 'victor's peace' fuelling ethnic rivalries, the second dynamic opens up a less well-charted scholarly terrain. The end of the war lifted Trincomalee's state of siege. The region's intensified exposure to the influx of new customs and opportunities invoked cross-ethnic anxieties about external influences corrupting local traditions, cultural conventions, and religious orientations.

These insights from Trincomalee corroborate the problematic teleological foundations of the term peace, but they vindicate that political geography has much to add to our understanding of post-war societies. The conceptualisation of post-war transition as a process of re-territorialisation captures the contested nature of what is presented as peace. And it draws our attention to the convoluted ground realities, some of which escape Sri Lanka's received political script of ethnic antagonism. This article builds on a series of research visits to eastern Sri Lanka over the past ten years, but focuses on the period after the war ended (in May 2009). During my fieldwork in 2010 (three months) and 2011 (two weeks), I revisited two of my previous research sites in Trincomalee District (Veeramanagar and Nilaveli), and added a third one, which had been a desolate place earlier (Lankapatuna). In addition, I conducted interviews with people in leadership positions throughout the region.

GEOGRAPHY, PEACE, AND POST-WAR TRANSITION

The Teleological Trap

The current debate on the geographies of war and peace was pioneered by Flint's edited volume 'Geography of War and Peace' (2005) and the special issue 'Geographies of Peace and Armed Conflict' edited by Kobayasi (2009). Both volumes, however, largely failed to problematise or define peace and the empirical focus tended to gravitate towards war, rather than peace, Williams and McConnell (2010) rightly pointed out. Megoran (2011) subsequently argued not only that geographers ought to better conceptualise and study peace, but also that they should put their work in its service. Subsequent discussions both in this journal (Koopman, 2011; Ross, 2011) and at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers in February 2012 underlined that peace is subject to divergent discursive constructions, and as such, it is an expression of

power. In this connection, the recent edited volume by Kirsch & Flint (2011) provides a useful point of departure. It posits that war and post-war geographies are embodiments of hegemonic power relations: producing the difference between them is itself a highly political, and often violent, project.

Though Megoran's intervention is laudable as a call for moral engagement, self-reflection and discursive interrogation, these discussions underline the perils of using the term peace for empirical analysis. In fact, I find the concept (and derivatives like peacebuilding or war-to-peace transition) troublesome for analysing post-war contexts, because it risks reducing these societies to their supposed direction. It makes research vulnerable to what we may call a teleological trap. Firstly, it is often not so clear that peace will be the actual outcome in such societies. In hindsight, a war-to-peace transition often turns out to be a war-to-war cycle (Dixon, 2009). Secondly, as acknowledged in the aforementioned debates, the term peace is elusive and definitions often end up being too narrow (absence of violence), or too encompassing (utopian visions of society) to be analytically useful. Peace – unlike war – is not a *condition*, a set of characteristics that can be delineated and observed. In line with the above call for a constructivist approach, peace is best thought of discursively, as an *aspiration* (see Richmond, 2005, for an elaborate historical discussion). But because there are typically contradictory views on what that aspiration entails, it paradoxically tends to prompt contention, and may even be twisted into an oxymoron like 'war for peace'. The war-peace dichotomy is thus a false one, as Kirsch & Flint (2011) rightly underline. Thirdly, societies emerging from armed conflict are not a mere legacy of it. The end of war involves a tantalising flurry of contingent processes, which are not all 'about peace' or the conflict that preceded them (see Lubkemann, 2008, for an interesting ethnography exhibiting these insights). Finally, calls for peace tend to have strong moral overtones and intervention-oriented categories. Normative schemata that aspire to categorise developments

as either pro- or contra- peace easily get in the way of a balanced empirical inquiry.

Geographical Perspectives on Post-War Transition

In an attempt to construct a more open-ended, less scripted understanding of war endings, I propose to take the angle of *post-war transition* as a process of *re-territorialisation*. Clearly, this conceptualisation does not entirely solve the above problems, but it carries less teleological luggage. It denotes a reconfiguration of political geography after large-scale organised violence has ended, but without pre-supposing the direction, the drivers, or the outcome. As elaborated by Vandergeest and Peluso (1995) – who in turn draw from Sack’s seminal work on territoriality (1986) – territorialisation refers to the effort of demarcating spaces and regulating people’s presence and activity within these spaces. This may encompass spatial practices of boundary-making, forging (dis)connections, surveillance and enforcement, as well as the symbolic, ideological and genealogical claims that serve to naturalise and legitimise these practices. As others have pointed out before me, these processes are closely associated with the enactment of the state, but state territorialisation is often challenged or compromised by other attempts at shaping the lay of the land (Elden 2010; Lunstrum, 2009; Ó Tuathail, 1999; Vandergeest & Peluso, 1995).

The trope of territorialisation is a useful vantage point for studying war and post-war transition. War produces and reproduces spatial orderings through military offensives, frontlines, checkpoints, interrupted flows and demolished infrastructure, legal and illicit transnational networks, displacement and settlement politics, and hardening social boundaries. The term ‘warscape’ has been coined to capture these convoluted geographies of violence and competing projects of rule (Korf et al., 2010; Lubkemann, 2008; Nordstrom 1997). What,

then, does a 'post-warscape' look like? What kind of re-territorialisation does the end of war entail? There is no consolidated body of geographical work on post-war societies, but we find useful contributions in both political ecology and critical geopolitics.

Political ecology provides one interesting angle. Building on wider debates on state territorialisation, violence and forest management, Peluso and Vandergeest (2011) explore the legacies of insurgencies and counterinsurgencies in post-war landscapes. Their historical narrative of so-called 'jungle wars' in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand explores military strategies in forested areas: depopulating forests, moving loyalist groups in, changing land use and vegetation, constructing roads, high-tech mapping and surveillance. These strategies cumulate into a post-war geography that is beneficial to state interests: clearly demarcated and largely unpopulated forests, a concentration of potentially oppositional populations in administered settlements, and established military presence in strategic locations. Brottem and Unruh's (2009) work on forest management, land tenure and territorial tensions in post-war Liberia corroborates these conclusions. War-time displacement left forests empty, thus enabling land use planners to work with a 'clean slate' and disregard customary land mechanisms.

A second set of authors comes from a different angle – critical geopolitics – to explore the way post-war political landscapes get defined and negotiated. The aforementioned volume by Kirsch & Flint (2011) stands out in this respect. Building on a wide range of contemporary and historical case studies, this group of authors emphasises the continuities between war-time and post-war power politics, violence, and the perpetual reshaping of places and space. Rather than separating out spaces and times of war and of peace, the book ventures to unravel how they constitute and compromise each other. Though the book does steer clear of the term territorialisation, this article's analysis tallies largely with

its overall argument. On a similar note, political geographers have explored migration, settlement and return in relation to ethno-territorial landscapes in post-war contexts (Dahlman & Ó Tuathail, 1995; O'Loughlin et al., 2008; Ó Tuathail & O'Loughlin, 2009). The political force fields of return are shaped by the legacies of ethnic cleansing, the segregation propelled by ethno-spatial claims, aid programmes aimed at promoting return and inter-mingling, and concerns about security, social ties and economic prospects. Post-war re-territorialisation thus involves many different levels and dimensions; it is not a mere derivative of the formal declaration of peace, be it through a peace agreement or a military victory.

Though we are far removed from a consolidated body of work, the above interventions provide useful insights for conceptualising post-war transition as a process of re-territorialisation. These transitions involve both change and continuity. The political geographies of war have enduring repercussions (i.e. the militarised warsapes of displacement, ethnic cleansing and re-articulated boundaries), but there are also manifold shifts and reconfigurations that take place in the post-war landscape (e.g. return, resettlement, reinvigorated ethno-territorial claims and state surveillance). Whilst there are major contextual differences, these observations carry great relevance to the Sri Lankan case.

War and Territorialisation in Sri Lanka

The political geography of Sri Lanka's ethno-secessionist war has not escaped scholarly attention. Several geographers have engaged with the contested spatial moral orders underpinning the war (Brun & Jazeel, 2009; Stokke, 1998). In short: the geographical ideologies of an independent Tamil homeland in the northeast ('Tamil Eelam') is at loggerheads with the Sinhala-Buddhist genealogical claim on an undivided Sri Lanka ('Dhamma Dipa'). As discussed by

Korf (2009), the latter notion spawned a 'Sinhala kind of geography', which uses a combination of genealogical, technological and ecological arguments to lay claims on the island's northeastern frontier (thus refuting the claim to a Tamil homeland).

These ethno-geographical ideologies propelled the escalation of war in the 1980s and 1990s. This, in turn, transformed Sri Lanka's political geography. Military offensives, frontlines and checkpoints, attacks on symbolically important sites and people, displacement, migration and attempts at ethnic cleansing, shifts in livelihood opportunities, the closure and erosion of infrastructural connections, and the hardening of ethnic fault lines – to name some of the most salient developments – produced a convoluted political landscape. Hyndman and De Alwis (2004) explore the changing significance of roads, religious sites and people's bodies, as sites of (in-)security, depending on one's gender, ethnicity and location. In synch with this variegated territorialisation, Goodhand et al. (2009) analyse the way religious actors navigated eastern Sri Lanka's convoluted geography of militarised frontlines and ethnic boundary activation. Korf et al. argue that east Sri Lanka's 'warscape' comprised the 'complex interplay of competing systems of authority' (2010: 395). These systems involve both coercive and other forms of rule, which converge and collide, and this causes local populations to operate in highly malleable ways. A corresponding literature focuses on the nexus between displacement and territorialisation. Amirthalingam and Lakshman's work (2009) discusses the livelihood dynamics around displacement (beneficial for some; detrimental for others) and associated issues of social status and caste. Brun (2003) and Spencer (2003) highlight the moral and political dimensions of displacement. Cultural registers render displaced people 'out of place', and this is seen to be a source of social tension, ethnic contestation, and the demise of dignity and purity.

Finally, there is geographical writing on Sri Lanka's ceasefire period, which is pertinent to this article (Korf, 2005, 2006; Korf & Fünfgeld, 2005). The island's political geography entered a state of flux with the signing of a ceasefire (2002), unsuccessful peace talks, and the re-escalation of war (2006). This turbulent phase spurred new forms of violence, a recalibration of ethno-political contestation, shifts in livelihoods opportunities and forms of rule. Some of these findings resonate with the more fundamental changes that took place after the defeat of the LTTE in May 2009. This article complements the existing literature on Sri Lanka by shedding light on the current post-war transition. By illustrating the many forms of re-territorialisation this brings along, it aspires to contribute to the wider debate on the geography on (conditions of) war and (aspirations of) peace.

RE-TERRITORIALISATION IN TRINCOMALEE

When I first visited Trincomalee, during the simmering military stalemate of 2000 and 2001, I encountered a compartmentalised geography of enclaves, frontlines and military surveillance. Part of the district was under LTTE control. Whilst the government's administrative structures continued to function in these 'uncleared areas', as the government euphemistically called them, the militants were firmly in charge (Gaasbeek, 2010; Klem, 2012; Korf et al., 2010). The district capital Trincomalee and smaller towns were under army control, but they were heavily infiltrated by the rebels, particularly in Tamil-speaking (Muslim or Tamil) settlements. The remainder of the district was a contested borderland. Most roads were considered army-controlled, but only during daytime and the vast swaths of forest were considered safe passage for the LTTE (see map 1).

Map 1. The Trincomalee region in 2001



Note: Maps 1 to 5 were composed by the author, using field observations and Google Earth satellite imagery as the main sources, supplemented with policy documents and Gaasbeek (2010). Spheres of military control are estimated on the basis of field observations, but leave some space for variance since there was no clear frontline. Forested surface areas are a rough estimation using satellite imagery. Special icons (temples, camps, military installations, relocation sites) are not used comprehensively: only the sites discussed in the article are pictured.

Political claims and military control were inter-connected with controversial changes in the region's ethnic geography over the Twentieth Century. As part of a country-wide effort to make Sri Lanka's northeastern Dry Zone suitable for irrigation, large parts of Trincomalee's scrub had been converted into irrigated agriculture. People from elsewhere were brought in to work these lands, which effectively meant increasing the Sinhala presence in the previously Tamil and Muslim dominated northeast, from 3.8% in 1911 to 33.4% in 1981, with concurrent electoral consequences (Gaasbeek, 2010; Korf, 2005, 2009; Korf & Fünfgeld, 2005; Peebles 1990). These changes challenged the Tamil claim of a geographically contiguous traditional Tamil homeland and were fuel to the separatist fire. Some of the LTTE's first attacks in the Trincomalee region targeted the Sinhala colonies (Peebles, 1990) and ethno-territorial fault lines deepened as the war escalated in the 1980s.

Everyday mobility was highly restricted by checkpoints, military frontlines, and the fear of going to unfamiliar places. The roads were bad, there was little public transport and many areas were only accessible with ramshackle ferries. The town Muthur (map 1), for example, was surrounded by LTTE controlled territory; the ferry to Trinco ran only twice a day and the road to Kantale was closed after dark (and not always usable during the monsoon). The coast from Sampur southwards was 'uncleared area' and only accessible on dirt roads and after passing the army checkpoint. Leaving the district was a different matter altogether. Most people had to register with the police to get a 'pass', and Colombo Road and Anuradhapura Road were the only way out. The coastal roads to the north (Mullaitivu) and south (Batticaloa) passed through LTTE territory and were practically closed. Public busses ran during the day only and the journey to Colombo took up to twelve hours, because of the degraded roads and the many checkpoints, where passengers had to get down and queue up for inspection. Many people had family members in the sizable Tamil diaspora across the globe,

but few outsiders came to Trincomalee. In many places, cell phone networks were shut down on military order, and few people had access to the internet.

The guarded boundaries, severed ties, tight surveillance and seclusion that were characteristic for Trincomalee's wartime geography got into flux in the turbulent decade after my first visit in 2000. The government and the LTTE signed a ceasefire in 2002. The subsequent peace talks produced no political breakthrough, but there were remarkable changes on the ground with the lifting of restrictions and (most) checkpoints (see also Gaasbeek, 2010; Korf, 2005, 2006; Korf & Fünfgeld, 2005). Violent incidents continued to occur, however, and this deteriorated after the 2004 split in the LTTE. These dynamics temporarily moved to the background, when the December 2004 tsunami caused death, destruction and displacement, which invoked an unprecedented aid response (Hyndman, 2007; McGilvray & Gamburd, 2010; Ruwanpura, 2008). Sri Lanka's protracted period of no-war-no-peace came to an end in 2006, when open warfare resumed with a battle over the Tamil-Muslim town Muthur and the LTTE hub Sampur (see map 1). Heavy bombardments pushed both the militants and civilians southward, and in 2007, the government declared the east 'liberated', and initiated reconstruction efforts to consolidate its victory (Goodhand, 2010). Trincomalee continued to be subject to tension and LTTE infiltration (particularly in the northern half of the district) as the war continued in the north of the island. Those battles set in motion a human massacre and culminated in the defeat of the LTTE in May 2009. In sum, the 2000s were a turbulent decade with a sequence of war, ceasefire, tsunami, resumed war and government victory. Rather than discussing each of these phases, the article focuses on the post-war situation.

Map 2. Trincomalee District in 2011



The political geography of Trincomalee District changed in profound ways with the government victory over the LTTE (see map 2). I discuss these developments on the basis of three particular locations: Veeramanagar, Lankapatuna and Nilaveli. These three sites complement each other well, as they expose different aspects of re-territorialisation in the region. Table 1, at the beginning of the next section, will provide an overview.

Site 1: Veeramanagar

During the war, Veeramanagar was a marginal village of about one hundred families. Some had a rudimentary house, but most lived in huts made of sticks and palm leaves, situated along a dirt road. There was a small Hindu temple and a few wells, but no running water, electricity, or telephone. Sources of income were scarce. People survived on the collection of firewood, shifting ('chenai') cultivation and fishing, but all three were curtailed by the war. Access to the outer world was heavily constrained, because Veeramanagar was 'uncleared' area. The village was tightly monitored by the LTTE and the next town of any significance was on the other side of the frontline. Apart from the trouble of interrogation at the army checkpoint, that journey was impaired by the bad state of the roads and lack of transport.

The village was considered the fringe of civilization: the soil was not ideal for agriculture, the ground-water level deep and wildlife never far away. Veeramanagar's inhabitants were Tamil-speaking Veddahs, Sri Lanka's indigenous population, who are often portrayed as impure and below the Tamil caste hierarchy. The LTTE – a proclaimed opponent of the caste system – treated them as Tamils. The movement entered the region in the mid-1980s as cycling guerrillas, but gradually became a professional army with a firm grip on society. Unlike Muslims and Sinhalese, the Veddahs were not evicted, but subjected to the movement's strict regulations. The youth were recruited for combat – with force or persuasion. As elsewhere, the LTTE brought village institutions into their orbit. One would rarely see uniformed LTTE cadres moving around, but it was clear that their influence was far-reaching.

The 2002 ceasefire eased the tension and the many restrictions, but war came back with a vengeance. In 2006, the first advances of the army into LTTE

territory took place in the area around Veeramanagar. The area's entire population was forced out by heavy bombardments. The people fled southward, escaped the LTTE (who used them as a human shield) and ended up in camps in the neighbouring district Batticaloa (for discussion on their plight in the camps, see Amirthalingam & Lakshman, 2009). When the government declared the east liberated from the LTTE a year later, it called on displaced people to return. The camps in Batticaloa were closed and people were housed in a transfer camp in Kilivetti (depicted on map 2 and 4).

Map 3. Veeramanagar in 2011



Note: Though lines of military control were somewhat fuzzy during the war, the approximate former frontlines on maps 3, 4 and 5 give a rough indication of what used to be boundary between 'cleared' and 'uncleared' area.

Veeramanagar's inhabitants were subsequently resettled in their village. With foreign aid, many families constructed houses, and infrastructure flourished. The once very isolated area became accessible again. Roads were asphalted, bridges replaced ferries, and the army built its own 'Outer Circular Road', encircling the Koddigar Bay, from close to Veeramanagar all the way up to Nilaveli (map 2 and 3). The electricity grid was extended to the villages (though they were still waiting to be connected), the school building was resurrected, and the water supply network was under construction. The inhabitants remained poor and marginalised, but they had access to the most rudimentary services and they could eke out a living with wage labour or fishery. Destitution proved fertile ground for new religious movements. Three evangelical churches poured into the village, of which the Assembly of God and the Calvary Church were the most successful. They spread the gospel in passionate services with lots of chanting, the miraculous healing of sick people and material assistance. None of this had been possible under LTTE rule, which had only accommodated the 'mainline' churches: Catholics and Methodists. 'During the LTTE years, it was not possible for those churches to come here,' the village leader told me, but now many families had joined these new churches. This, of course, caused unease with both Hindus and mainline churches, who had trouble coming up with an effective response

The biggest change to the village, however, was the construction of a new settlement right by its side. The inhabitants of Navaratnapuram – another Veddah village, on the beach a few kilometres away (map 3) – underwent a very similar sequence of events, but when they ended up in the Kilivetti camp, they learnt their native place had been declared off-limits. Upon capturing the LTTE stronghold around Sampur, the government had declared that whole area a 'High Security Zone', presumably to secure Trincomalee's navy harbour across the bay. Subsequently, it became a so-called 'Special Economic Zone', with an Indian-

owned power station (map 3). Ironically, it made little difference: the large swath of land remained a *de facto* military zone that civilians were not allowed to enter.

The Navaratnapuram community was unlucky. Though their village lay far away from the prospective industries, it was just within the confines of the zone and they never saw their homes again. The government offered them alternative land for relocation, right next to Veeramanagar, because the ancestors of both communities were related. Some of the people accepted the government's offer. They were fed up with life in the Kilivetti camp and settled in the new village, which they named after the old one: Navaratnapuram. Many of them had second thoughts, though. Out of the 120 families, only forty were actually given a house, and they were further away from their main source of income: the sea. In (old) Navaratnapuram, they could start fishing on the beach next to their houses. 'This is a jungle area,' they complained.

Their disappointment bolstered the resistance of all those people who still remained in the Kilivetti transfer camp: over 1200 families from all the villages in the Special Economic Zone (in addition to smaller numbers in three other transfer camps). The responsible government administrator identified alternative lands to be allocated to those displaced by the Special Economic Zone. But the camp inhabitants turned down his suggestions, and demanded resettlement on their native land. The suggested relocation sites were not favourable in terms of agriculture and drinking water, and often close to the jungle, where elephants and other wild animals were a source of danger.

This was compounded by caste considerations. They made it clear to me that a respectable high caste cultivator ('Vellala'), the proud descendant from a pure place like Sampur with clean water and several tanks for irrigation would not settle in a remote village with Veddahs or low-caste fishermen on one side and

wild animals on the other. An older man in the Kilivetti camp told me: 'We will not go there. Not even animals can live there. There is no water. Sampur people won't go to the jungle.' And therefore, the community from Sampur and surrounding villages continued to bargain with the government, even after several years in the deplorable conditions of Kilivetti camp. The LTTE had lost its struggle for a Tamil homeland, but the people from Sampur continued to struggle for their home.

Site 2: Lankapatuna

During the war, outsiders – let alone Sinhalese people – were rarely sighted in Veeramanagar. After 2009, however, its inhabitants witnessed busloads of Sinhalese tourists passing through, asking for directions, and picnicking along the road. Sinhalese road signs directed them to a place called Lankapatuna (in Tamil: Ilankaithurai, or 'Lanka's Port'). This had been a deserted place with an armed LTTE watch post, but became a Buddhist pilgrimage site and one of the busiest (Sinhala) tourist attractions in the district. Lankapatuna is a natural landmark: an elevated rock that sticks out of the shoreline and lies at the mouth of the Ullackalli lagoon (see map 4). In the 1940s, a Buddhist monk identified the Lankapatuna's natural anchorage as the place where Buddha's tooth – Sri Lanka's most prominent relic – was brought to the island in 301 CE. During the war, LTTE cadres captured the rock and used it as a gun post. Following the 2006 offensive, the government reinstated the religious site.

The checkpoint at the foot of Lankapatuna's rock and the large military camp (with permanent housing structures) along the approach road (map 4) provide physical reinforcement for the site's symbolic significance. Lankapatuna's recent history, first occupied by Tamil terrorists, then liberated by Sinhala-Buddhist soldiers, ties together Buddhism, Sinhalese genealogy, and heroic struggle. And

as such, it forms a near seamless contemporary continuation of Buddhist chronicles. Today, Lankapatuna's history can be read on a small memorial stone or on the postcards sold at the site.

Map 4. Lankapatuna in 2011



For many visitors, Lankapatuna is part of a tour, which includes the – much more established – Seruwila temple, the Somawathie temple further south and the 'ancient city' Polonnaruwa, in the neighbouring district. The latter part of the journey is a new possibility. The Somawathie shrine lies in the jungle and used to be poorly accessible, but is now reachable on the new road from Seruwila to Polonnaruwa District. Significantly, the road connects prominent Buddhist sites with the Sinhala hinterland. Like the 'Outer Circular Road', this connection was not created by the Road Development Authority, but by the army.

The land along the road belongs to the Seruwila temple and the leading monk ventured to invite poor Sinhala families from outside the district to settle here. In September 2011, nearly one hundred families from neighbouring districts had started a living in this erstwhile 'uncleared' forest area. These marginalised rural Sinhalese had left their far-away villages for the prospect of free land, though the conditions were difficult. There were wild elephants and drinking water was a few kilometres away. Some of the settlers had in fact deserted their new homes again. They retained their land, but the jungle encroached on their neglected dwellings of clay, sticks and asbestos. The majority of the new arrivals, however, defied the wild elephants, the heat, and the lack of facilities. They pioneered a life, cultivated their crops, and sent their children to school.

Moving to the colony was not just a land deal to escape the poverty in their home district. It was part of a bigger civilising project of taming the jungle and making the Buddhist shrines accessible. 'The monk told us to come and help protect the pilgrims,' a man from Badulla explained to me. 'I am here to cultivate and contribute to the nation.' The sacred sites, the pilgrims and tourists, the army road and the new settlers were thus understood as part of a bigger project. This did not escape Tamils and Muslims in the surrounding area, for whom these efforts amounted to 'Sinhala colonisation'. We will return to these interpretations after discussing the third site, which lies at the opposite side of Trincomalee District.

Site 3: Nilaveli

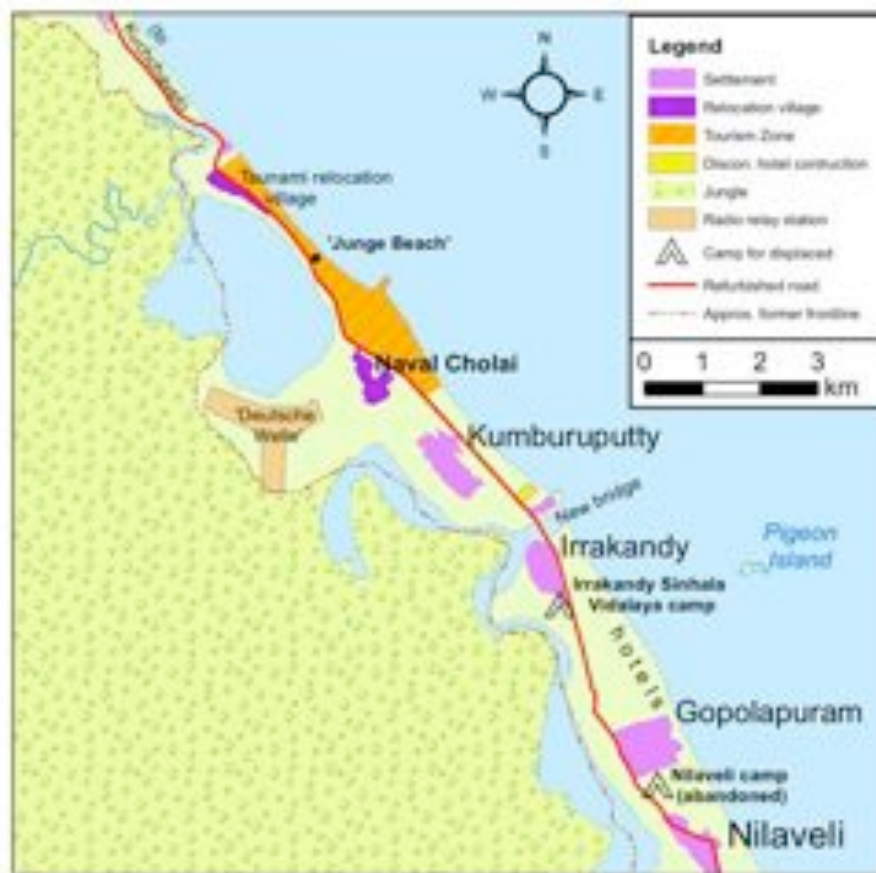
The northern part of Trincomalee District borders the Vanni, the LTTE's main stronghold on the island until its defeat in 2009. Along the sea, one finds small Tamil and Muslim settlements. Further inland there are Sinhala farming villages.

Most of these farmers arrived with the irrigation schemes that were developed between the 1950s and the 1980s. During the war, big parts of this region were sparsely inhabited. The LTTE drove Sinhalese settlers away and many Tamils and Muslims living along the coast fled towards Trinco town.

Most inhabitants of this region had in fact been displaced several times. This also applied to the people living in the 'Nilaveli Welfare Centre' (see map 1), a camp just outside Nilaveli town, where I briefly resided as a Master's student in 2001. There were about one hundred families, most of whom had moved around the district or to and from the Vanni and finally ended up in this camp in the late 1990s. Some of them no longer had a home; others could not access it, because it was occupied by one of the many military camps. Though the Nilaveli camp was well within 'cleared area', its inhabitants had to negotiate the pressures from both the military and the LTTE. Navy patrols would enter the camp to question – and occasionally harass, or arrest – people. Though the LTTE was not visibly present in the camp, they visited the households at night and exercised a form of 'remote control'. Most inhabitants of the Nilaveli camp were poor, but earned some money with daily agricultural labour and fisheries.

Nilaveli Welfare Centre remained in place until 2009, despite the turbulent developments of the ceasefire, the tsunami, and resumed warfare. After the war, it was closed and the people were relocated in a newly built tsunami scheme called Naval Cholai, in Kumburuputty, ten kilometres to the north (see map 5). This had long been a relatively desolate area. Peculiarly, the relay station of the German radio ('Deutsche Welle') had continued to function, but for common people, the area was considered insecure and the ferry service across the mouth of the lagoon was unreliable. But with the refurbishment of the roads, the newly constructed bridges, the disappearance of checkpoints, and the improved bus service, it was only a short ride from Trincomalee town in 2011.

Map 5. Nilaveli in 2011



Relocation in Naval Cholai was met with a mix of appreciation and complaint. It was good to have a fenced-off plot of land, with a brick house and proper sanitation after spending years in palm-leaf huts. Yet, many people in Naval Cholai were still struggling to survive. They lived close to the jungle, and far away from facilities. Particularly the fishermen were dissatisfied with the long distance to the sea. Their own homes and the Nilaveli camp had practically been at the beach. Naval Cholai was not that far from the sea, but the adjacent coastal strip was off-limits; not because it was already inhabited, but because the government had installed a large tourism zone: the 'Nilaveli Kumburuputty Tourism Resort' (map 5).

The beaches along the coast north of Trincomalee town have long been known for their pristine beauty, but the few hotels that survived the war were in a deplorable state. The 2002 ceasefire agreement heralded a short-lived rise in tourist arrivals. After the resumption of warfare and the 2009 defeat of the LTTE, the tourism potential of Nilaveli's coast re-entered the limelight and this time the government thought big: the newly declared tourism zone was to cater for 48 hotels with a total of 3000 rooms. Emphasis was placed on 'five star' or 'boutique' hotels. In 2011, only one of these hotels was making visible progress. The sign at the construction site read: 'Jungle Beach, a 50 key luxury resort'. Two other projects (outside the zone) had discontinued construction efforts. This was because of the high land lease prices levied by the government, a bureaucrat explained to me. Many other lots remained empty for the same reason, but the land continued to be cordoned off. Along the road to Trincomalee town, smaller hotels, beach bungalows, restaurants, and even massage parlours mushroomed. Some hotels and restaurants were run by the armed forces; in other cases local families or newly arrived Sinhalese entrepreneurs responded to the emerging market. Foreign tourists and the Colombo elite meanwhile settled in luxury resorts for 250 US dollar a night. Busloads of middle and lower class Sri Lankan tourists found a place to rest with relatives, in cheap guesthouses, or in Buddhist temples.

In addition to tourists, the area witnessed an influx of Sinhala returnees. Their parents or grandparents had settled in Nilaveli and Kumburuputty from the 1950s onwards, but they were displaced by the war, sometimes to Trincomalee town, but usually further afield. The government victory over the LTTE paved the way for their return, but many had built up new lives in places with better infrastructure and schools. Social networks had moved and unlike their bi-lingual parents, the children no longer spoke Tamil. The government had put up a camp at Irrakandy Sinhala Vidyalaya (map 5) for returnees. Its inhabitants explained to

me they were driven by personal misfortune like poverty, divorce or other personal tragedies. Though they were not altogether homeless, the government provided these returnees with temporary shelters and food rations. Many families decided to send one or two people only. The children stayed behind to continue their education, while a parent or grandparent settled in the camp, with one main objective: to reclaim their lands.

The problem was, however, that the land was no longer theirs. They had sold it during the war, because it was worth little then and it was hard to imagine returning to the war zone. Some also claimed they had been tricked or pressured into selling their land. Several returnees had initiated court cases to sort out these matters, but their expectations were low. Since the present inhabitants of these contested plots were unlikely to vacate it for Sinhala returnees, the local government administrator, a Tamil, identified an alternative site for the returnees to settle down. And that brings us back to Naval Cholai, Kumburuputty, the scheme where the former inhabitants of Nilaveli Welfare Centre had been relocated. The administrator selected the jungle area right behind the Naval Cholai scheme for the Sinhala returnees. Unsurprisingly, the returnees were unhappy with his suggestion. Sixteen out of the twenty-seven families residing in the Irrakandy Sinhala Vidalaya camp declined the offer altogether. The proposed relocation site was remote, and drinking water was hard to come by, but most importantly: many returnees had a better place to stay. They had come back to claim their parents' land – to live there or to sell it – but not to be relocated in a desolate jungle area.

The Tamil community, which had just been relocated in Naval Cholai also voiced concerns. The sea side was blocked by a tourism zone, and the government was about to construct a Sinhala village land inwards. My respondents in Naval Cholai were less adept than some of the elite informants quoted in the next section

when it came to constructing a coherent discourse of state oppression and Sinhala domination, but they did see the above developments in that light. 'Little by little, they are taking,' a middle-aged woman summarised the anxiety.

DIVERGENT VIEWS ON POST-WAR RE-TERRITORIALISATION

Each of the three sites thus underwent a remarkable diversity of changes. Table 1 provides a succinct overview and categorises the main developments under four captions. In brief, post-war re-territorialisation in the Trincomalee region involved: 1) the naming and claiming of sites and zones; 2) a period of wandering people and shifting settlement patterns; 3) the re-connection of an isolated region with the outside world through refurbished infrastructure; which 4) lubricated mobility and the region's exposure to outside influences.

Table 1. Schematic overview of changes in the three sites

Case	Zones and sites	Settlements	Infrastructure	New influences
1. Veeramanagar	- High Security Zone. - Later declared Special Economic Zone.	- People returning to Veeramanagar; - Navaratnapuram relocated.	- New roads (partly built by the army).	- Ability to move around without checkpoint and frontline. - Evangelical churches.
2. Lankapatuna	- Sacred Buddhist site.	- New Sinhala settlers along Somawathie Road	- New road (built by the army) to Somawathie, connecting Buddhist sites.	- Pilgrims, tourists and military presence.
3. Nilaveli	- Tourism zone.	- Displaced Tamils relocated in Naval Cholai. - Sinhala returnees trying to reclaim land.	- Improved road. - New bridges replacing ferries.	- Soaring tourist arrivals. - New hotels, restaurants and massage parlours.
Re-territorialization through naming and claiming territory...	... wandering people...	... reconnecting an isolated region...	... circulation and exposure.

During interviews, it became clear that these developments are intimately inter-related in people's reading of Trincomalee's post-war transition. My interlocutors connected this welter of changes to larger historical narratives. Importantly for this article, political geography stands at the core of these narratives. They propel

territorial claims on home or homeland; they render people and processes in or out of place; and they harbour political anxieties about preserving local purities and traditions.

The following paragraphs explore the discourses of post-war re-territorialisation that were current in the Trincomalee region. Although similar discourses can be found among the agricultural labourers and fishermen described above, this section foregrounds the views of the more educated class in the various small towns (e.g. religious leaders, bureaucrats, school teachers, businessmen). Two main sets of dynamics emerge from these discursive readings. The first evolves around the spatial consolidation of the government's military victory, and ethnic antagonism spurred by it. The second comprises moral panic – shared by all ethnic groups – over the preservation of the local way of life in a region that gets reconnected with its outside.

The Consolidation of Military Victory: Peaceful Development or Colonisation

As became clear in the three sites, the end of the war heralds a period where lots of people are on the move. Shifting settlement patterns are obviously highly controversial. In the local – development-inspired – lingo, these changes are referred to as resettlement (people returning home), relocation (people shifted to neighbouring lands if their homes are inaccessible) or colonisation (new arrivals settling on newly allocated land). We encountered all three in the previous section: in Veeramanagar (resettlement), Naval Cholai (relocation), and along Somawathie road (colonisation), though the line between the three terms is often finer than admitted. For example, the Sinhala people in the Irrakandy Sinhala Vidalaya camp (near Nilaveli) present themselves as 'returnees' (resettlement), but those who can't get their land back may end up in Naval Cholai (relocation), and many Tamils perceive them as a government-sponsored infringement

(colonisation). Rather than mere factual differences, these three terms embody political qualifications about the legitimacy of human settlements. They imply judgments about whether or not people belong where they are, whether they come home (resettlement), get pushed aside by other people or state interests (relocation) or intrude a given territory (colonisation). This directs us to wider discursive readings of 'development' in the wake of the military victory.

According to many Tamil and Muslim community leaders, the settling of Sinhala families is but one form of colonisation. In their view, this term in fact captures Trincomalee's post-war condition at large, most saliently the claims on land around sacred places (like Lankapatuna), the High Security Zone in Sampur (later relabelled as Special Economic Zone), and the tourism zone in Kumburuputty. The ensemble of all these measures comprised the spatial consolidation of a victor's peace. Now that the government has eradicated the LTTE, 'they want to put down this uprising forever,' as an old Christian priest put it succinctly. These interventions tally with a much older discourse of a Sinhala-dominated state trying to control the island's northeastern frontier, the Dry Zone where Tamils and Muslims had prevailed historically. The narrative of the development of 20th Century irrigation schemes was common knowledge among local elite and agricultural labourers alike. The schemes had in part been legitimated with the discovery of 'ancient' Buddhist sites, and had markedly increased the Sinhala proportion of the population in Trincomalee District. Through these efforts, 'Trincomalee was systematically colonised,' a retired Tamil university lecturer in Trinco town told me. Now that the war was over and the LTTE defeated, these interventions continued with full vigour, he explained and the spatial pattern was clear: 'there's a [Buddhist] shrine, an army camp, a [Sinhala] village.' A respected Tamil businessman added that 'people feel as if our place is invaded by another force.' He acknowledged that 'the government has the right to bring

some people in, but not to change the demography, to change the political scenario.'

Unsurprisingly, there is a counter-view to this discourse of post-war territorialisation as colonisation. This interpretation has been well described in the literature on Sri Lanka (Korf, 2009; Peebles, 1990; Spencer, 2003). This view underlines that making remote jungle inhabitable for the rural poor eases the overpopulated Wet Zone in southern Sri Lanka's and exploits the under-utilised agricultural potential of the sparsely populated Dry Zone. 'The problem', a retired Sinhala administrator explained with incontrovertible simplicity, 'is we have population growth, but no land growth.' The government has the duty to provide land for the poor, he went on, so people are settled, mostly the majority Sinhalese, but Tamils and Muslims as well. They 'used to live together peacefully', until the 'ethnic problem' stirred them up. It is that kind of communalism that caused trouble, he concluded, not the clearing of jungle for the poor. Seen from this perspective, post-war development interventions and the freedom to move around were the hallmarks of peace, and it was in fact rather ethno-centric of the Tamil-speaking minorities to claim the whole northeast for themselves. Moreover, this was perceived as hypocritical, because so many Tamils and Muslims live in Colombo and foreign countries. A Muslim academic explained to me: 'we [Muslims and Tamils] also bought houses in Colombo and Kandy, so why can't they [Sinhalese] buy land here.' Moreover, attempts to keep people out of the district were ill founded, several Tamil civil servants acknowledged. Preserving Trincomalee's war-time isolation was not an option. They acknowledged the possible effects on the demographic ratio, but that was no reason to get stuck in ethno-puritan nostalgia. 'Actually, this area needs development,' a senior Tamil administrator emphasised, and therefore it was unwise to protest against tourism zones and new investments. 'We may lose some land, but the national income has to be improved. Hotels and tourist arrivals will boost the foreign exchange.

That will benefit the people also. There will be shops, infrastructure and employment.'

That was precisely the gist of the many government development plans after the war, for the whole island ('Mahinda Chintanaya', or Mahinda's plan), the Eastern Province ('Negenahira Navodaya', or Re-awakening of the East) and the Trincomalee harbour area (the 'Metro Urban Development Area'). Each of these plans were strongly focused on infrastructure: roads, power plants, harbours, industrial zones and airports. Measures like the Special Economic Zone were to bolster the potential of the Trincomalee harbour. The victory over the LTTE finally enabled the realisation of pre-war development visions. From a national planning perspective, Trincomalee's harbour region was well positioned to serve as a counter-hub to Colombo, where over-population and infrastructural congestion posed increasing obstacles to development. Contemporary government plans project an image of a developmental state inspired by the success of countries like Singapore and Malaysia. They steer clear from 'the ethnic problem', and issues of political reform. In similar vein, President Mahinda Rajapaksa negated these contentions when he announced the military victory in parliament: he called for 'peace, development and good governance', and argued there would no longer be any minorities, only those who love Sri Lanka and those who don't (for critical discussion, see Jazeel & Ruwanpura, 2009).

The consolidation of the government victory over the LTTE was thus a central plank in prevalent interpretations of post-war re-territorialisation in Trincomalee, but the values attached to it were diametrically opposed. The basic political binary was one between the state's 'development' agenda, which could be taken forward now that there was 'peace', and the counter-narrative of Sinhala 'colonisation' of the historic 'homeland' of the Tamils and Muslims. The former tends to render interventions technical, thus circumventing sensitive issues

around ethnic demography and political rights. The latter does the opposite: it renders post-war changes political, thus attributing a whole set of changes to a state-engineered scheme of Sinhala-domination.

The struggle over re-territorialisation in post-war Trincomalee is more complicated than this binary suggests, however. Both discourses shrug over contradictions and inconsistencies. Neither 'the Sinhala-dominated state', nor the Tamil and Muslim minority are coherent entities (not to mention the bloody history of Tamil-Muslim contention). There are in fact several other levels of contestation. For example, the tussles over resettlement around the Special Economic Zone were not only driven by ethnicity, but also by the divide between Sampur's high-caste Tamils and Veeramanagar's Veddahs. For the inhabitants of the Kilivetti camp, keeping distance from the Veddahs and fishermen was no less important than keeping out the Sinhalese. Sampur, in their view, was not just Tamil territory, but high-caste territory as well. A much older pre-occupation of belonging and cultural purity thus blended with new anxieties about military occupation and ethnic claims on space.

Similarly, the ensemble of government interventions and Sinhala settlers is a lot more divided than the colonisation narrative is willing to admit. This discourse portrays settlers, soldiers, monks, hotel owners and road builders as a united front, but they are clearly fractured by different views and interests. To recall a few examples: some of the families settling along Somawathie Road have left again, because of the harsh conditions. Some of the tourism companies have discontinued the construction of new hotels in the Nilaveli area, because of the high land-lease prices. Some of the Sinhala returnees in the Irrakandy refugee camp did not intend to stay: if they managed to re-claim their land (which was far from certain), their plan was to sell it. And finally, the controversial roads built by the army (the Outer Circular Road and the Somawathie Road) were starting to

erode, a staff member of the Road Development Authority explained to me, because his office was not keen to take responsibility for roads constructed by the military, which served to enhance surveillance and the connection of Buddhist sites.

Post-war re-territorialisation in Trincomalee is thus a story of both spatial domination as well as forms of resistance, contingency and compromise. Indeed, the military zones, tourism zones, the support for Sinhala settlers and claims on Buddhist sites can be read as spatial embodiments of the government's triumphant grip on the minorities in the island's periphery, but there are other layers and developments that offset this discourse of colonisation.

Re-Territorialisation as Circulation and Exposure

The above-discussed contention over the spatial consolidation of the government's military victory are important, but relatively unsurprising. It is this kind of contestation that one would expect over the political geography of a 'victor's peace'. The interpretations explored in this final section open up a less well-charted terrain: a sense of moral panic shared among all ethnic groups over the influx of new customs and beliefs after the war. As became clear in all three sites of the previous section, the end of the war lifted many of the restrictions and disconnections that had long attenuated mobility, exposure and exchange.

Veeramanagar used to be an isolated place, because of the frontline, the checkpoints, tight LTTE surveillance, the poor state of the roads, and the absence of transport. At present, Sinhala tourists pass by on their way to Lankapatuna and the inhabitants can move freely: the roads are much better, there is no checkpoint, and it is safe to travel after dark. The demise of the LTTE has also opened up a market for evangelical churches, which has resulted in a rather

dramatic change of the religious landscape. Large parts of the population now spend their Sunday's in the passionate chanting ceremonies of these charismatic churches. Interviews with several priests in the region confirm this is the prevalent pattern across eastern Sri Lanka, but particularly in former LTTE territory, where many people are destitute and proselytising was not possible in the past. Mainline churches, as well as Hindu and Buddhist leaders struggle to come up with an effective response.

Lankapatuna used to be a desolate rock with an LTTE gun post. At present we see kids ring the temple bell and chase each other on the beach. Similarly, the beaches north of Trincomalee have become a popular day trip destination. A sleepy town like Nilaveli now sees the busloads of domestic tourists and the fancy vehicles of the Colombo elite come by. The visiting school classes and families create an unprecedented busyness in the area. At night, there are parties with drums, singing, and young men getting drunk on the beach.

The people I interviewed in Trincomalee District were generally very appreciative of the increased mobility and security. Going to Colombo in six hours on a smooth road at any time of day was obviously preferable to the bumpy twelve-hour ride with countless checkpoints. Trincomalee was being reconnected with the world and that made life easier, it provided better access to education and services, and it improved livelihood options. 'After the war, we are blossoming,' a Sinhala school principal said. But the lifting of the barriers also exposed the district to the world. A world that was seen to threaten the local customs and values, the cherished sense of being a community of chaste, devoted and dignified people. In the words of the Buddhist monk at one of the village temples: 'the opening up also brings drugs and internet and mobile phones. Unnecessary [implying bad] things come. We are closer to the world. So those things are also closer to us.'

These concerns around the decay of dignity and moral purity and a sense of vulnerability were shared by Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim leaders alike. 'Tourism will bring so many cultures,' a Muslim journalist predicted. 'We may lose our cultural values. Narcotics, child abuse, those things.' Many people also complained about the marked increase of trash lying around throughout the region with the influx of tourists. The massage parlours, a novelty in the region, were a particular source of concern. The arrival of young Sinhala women who ran an independent business, rode around on a motorcycle, and massaged strange men provoked rumours of prostitution. 'Sometimes, they do a second massage also,' a Muslim civil servant suggestively confided to me. 'Now, if people are talking about a massage, we immediately think about the second massage.'

These controversies were part of a wider concern with preserving a discursive sense of purity and innocence in the region. 'Cultural wise, our town was very isolated during the war,' a respected citizen from Muthur explained. The end of the war unleashed new threats to that culture. 'Young people are taking alcohol. And when they are drunk, bad things happen. Theft, for example. They are even smoking. Because they are connected to the other areas. People are worried about this, but we can't control that.' When the LTTE was there, Muslim people would not just go to the next town. 'People were with their families. So children were under close control of their father. Now, the youngsters are free to go.' Mosques – a primary source of surveillance in Muslim settlements during the war – have increasing trouble to exercise their authority. 'Before, the mosque had the power to control everything,' but now 'our society can't be controlled so easily. The sale of alcohol is high. The selling of cigarettes is high. People's use of public places, also very high. They think, after freedom, we need entertainment.'

The improved access to internet and mobile phones aggravates this sentiment. Very few places had internet during the war and because cell phone networks

were heavily curtailed by the military, few people had a mobile phone. Places like Nilaveli or Veeramanagar were forlorn. After the defeat of the LTTE, these media became widely available across the district. Computer education was seen as a welcome hallmark of modernity, but the downside was obvious. 'I can't control my son not to use the internet,' the same Muslim leader from Muthur said. 'I teach him to use it for his future. But when he goes out, I don't know what kind of internet he's using. What kind of pages he is watching. In Tamil we say, we can't see the other side of the wall. We are thinking, maybe that is better. However, we are trying to see what is on the other side. Muslim youth may also want to see what's on the next page.' The once so isolated towns and villages of Trincomalee district were thus being absorbed into a world of liquor, procrastination, tobacco, and pornography. Of course, the northeastern warscape had never been cut off completely (trans-national ties with the diaspora being the prime example) but external influences had been attenuated and constrained by checkpoints, frontlines, curfews, lack of infrastructure, and tight surveillance – be it by the LTTE, the army, fathers, or mosques. The removal of these restrictions and control mechanisms opened up a Pandora's box. The seclusion of the war had been a source of trouble, but the seductions of post-war life generate a whole new set of concerns.

CONCLUSIONS

Earlier interventions in this journal have engaged with the troublesome politics of post-war Sri Lanka, by indicating how current government rhetoric and practices undermined the transformation of 'post-war Sri Lanka into a peaceful country' (Ruwanpura, 2010: 404), towards 'an equitable peace' (Jazeel & Ruwanpura, 2009: 385). While I share the underlying concerns voiced in these essays, I argue that a thorough understanding of Sri Lanka's present transition requires us to take a step back from notions of peace, 'peacebuilding' and 'war-to-peace

transition', and the normative reflex of categorising current developments as working either for or against it. This article has explored Trincomalee's turbulent and multi-faceted transition after the defeat of the LTTE. In doing so, it aims to contribute to recent geographical work that conceives of post-war political landscapes as embodiments of hegemonic power relations (Kirsch & Flint, 2011), while taking issue with more teleological and normatively calls for a geographical engagement with peace (such as Megoran, 2011).

The observations in Veeramanagar, Lankapatuna and Nilaveli brought forward expectable observations, like increased mobility, continued ethnic tensions and a firmer grip of the government military. But they also highlighted more surprising changes to do with evangelical churches, cigarettes, drunken tourists, and anxieties about preserving traditional culture. This welter of seemingly unconnected developments raises questions about post-war transition: empirically (what processes does it entail?), conceptually (how to interpret, categorise and connect them?) and possibly normatively (how legitimate are the many controversial interventions?). Political geography is well positioned to address these questions. Conceiving of post-war transition as a process of re-territorialisation opens up fertile ground for scholarly analysis. It directs us to the layered struggles over genealogy and belonging (the tussles over migration and settlement patterns), the forging of new and old connections between places (e.g. roads, bridges, telecommunication), the lifting of certain boundaries (e.g. the frontline) and the creation of others (e.g. around the Special Economic Zone and the Tourism Zone).

The analysis of post-war re-territorialisation in Trincomalee brought forward two pertinent observations. The first comprises the spatial consolidation of the government's military victory over the LTTE: the resettlement, relocation and colonisation of people, the refurbishment of sacred sites, and the creation of

demarcated zones for economic and military purposes. Key informants sympathetic to the government tended to render these processes technical (this is 'development'). More militant Tamil and Muslim leaders rendered them political (this is 'colonisation'). These contradictory readings highlight the polarised nature of Sri Lanka's present predicament. However, the process of re-territorialisation is more compromised and contingent than these discourses suggest, for example because state territorialisation blends with other dynamics, such as caste-inspired land claims (in Sampur), market forces (hotels discontinue construction), and administrative protocol (army roads are not maintained). This finding tallies well with the existing scholarship on political contestation and territorialisation, both on Sri Lanka (Hyndman & De Alwis, 2004; Goodhand et al., 2009; Korf & Fünfgeld, 2005; Korf et al., 2010) and more widely (Lunstrum, 2009; Vandergeest & Peluso, 1995).

The second observation about post-war re-territorialisation concerns the opening up of a region that used to be characterised by surveillance, frontlines and attenuated flows. The increased mobility and connectivity brought about by roads, bridges, telephone networks and internet generated opportunities, but people were also anxious about losing the seclusion that the war had inadvertently provided. Leaders from all three ethnic communities feared the intensified exposure to a world of tobacco, alcohol, drugs, pornography, noisy late-night parties and independent young women running massage parlours. These threats to localised notions of purity, tradition and chasteness could not be blamed on the government, and escaped Sri Lanka's received plot of ethnic rivalries. Rather, they tapped into more fundamental registers of migration and exposure as a source of 'moral disorder', well-described by Brun (2003) and Spencer (2003). These anxieties have colonial and post-colonial antecedents, Spencer reminds us. This article illustrates that they become particularly evocative with the intense re-territorialisation at the end of the war.

Trincomalee's spatial changes and discursive turf battles are context specific, but the general dynamic of reconfiguring territorialisation at the end of a war has wider analytical purchase. The analysis presented here reverberates with the somewhat fragmented body of geographical work on post-war contexts. Scholars of political ecology have articulated the controversies of filling, populating and controlling peripheral spaces that were emptied – or otherwise altered – by war (Brottem & Unruh, 2009; Peluso & Vandergeest, 2011). These observations resonate with Trincomalee's contentions over the militarised demarcation of space (the High Security Zone cum Special Economic Zone) and infrastructure (roads built by the army), and the intense controversies over resettlement, relocation and colonisation.

Furthermore, these controversies match insights from authors in the field of critical geopolitics (Dahlman & Ó Tuathail, 1995; Kirsch & Flint, 2011; O'Loughlin et al., 2008; Ó Tuathail & O'Loughlin, 2009). Among other things, this body of work has explored the many forces exerted on migration and return in landscapes scarred by forced displacement and ethnic cleansing. In line with these observations, the Sri Lankan case exhibits multi-layered struggles of ethno-territorial claims, reified political boundaries, and ethnic re-mixing under the banner of 'peace' and 'development'.

This article thus corroborates the analytical contribution of political geography to our understanding of societies emerging from war. Conceptualising post-war transition as a process of re-territorialisation provides a powerful angle on the volatile state of changes that take place in such contexts. This perspective captures the contested nature of the post-war landscape: what is presented as (a process towards) peace, harbours continued ethno-territorial rivalries and the concerns about the consolidation of state power. But in addition, the trope of re-

territorialisation directs us towards a much less familiar theme in analyses of post-war contexts: the narrative of circulation and exposure in an erstwhile fragmented and secluded region. It is through these kinds of empirical insights – which offset both overly teleological interpretations and Sri Lanka’s register of ethnic antagonism – that political geography can help bring about a robust, context-sensitive understanding of post-war transition.

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Annex 1: Complementary publications

There were several research efforts and outputs alongside the articles presented in Part II. Most of these efforts were collaborative endeavours, either for scholarly outlets, or for policy-related audiences. Two of them were book reviews. These publications emerged in the same time period as my PhD research, but they are not a core part of the dissertation presented here. However, they are related and complementary to the analyses presented in Part I and II of this document, and it is for that reason that I list them in this annex.

- Frerks, G. and B. Klem (2011) "Muddling the peace process: The political dynamics of the tsunami, aid and conflict," in J. Goodhand, B. Korf, and J. Spencer (eds.) *Conflict and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka: Caught in the Peace Trap?* pp. 168-182. London and New York: Routledge.
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